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# THE ROMANIC REVIEW

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION

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The Editors are grateful to the English Institute for permission to print its symposium on "The Poetics of French Symbolism" and to Professor Harry Levin, Chairman of the original conference, who consented to introduce the four papers. To them have been added an editorial comment and two review articles dealing with the bibliography of French Symbolism.

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## THE POETICS OF FRENCH SYMBOLISM

### INTRODUCTORY NOTE

By Harry Levin

FOUR of the following papers were originally presented to a conference of the English Institute held at Columbia University, September 13-17, 1954. The fifth is an editorial commentary, which should go far to bridge the gap between those discussions and the present context. As students of literature whose special interests happen to center upon a neighboring field, we count ourselves fortunate in having obtained this expert guidance into so strategic and problematic a borderland. For two full generations, ever since Arthur Symonds translated certain poems for the benefit of William Butler Yeats, English poetry has responded almost as directly as French to the unique stimulus of the *symbolistes*. What Sir Maurice Bowra has entitled *The Heritage of Symbolism* is indeed the immediate tradition behind the leading poets of Europe and America today. That *frisson nouveau* which Victor Hugo experienced, when he first felt the impact of Baudelaire, already portended *le coucher du soleil romantique*, if not the twilight chill of *Le Parnasse*. The official manifesto of 1886, surviving in the files of *Le Figaro*, is for us a merely historical document. However, we may find it significant that "symbolist" was equated with "decadent" by contemporaries both hostile and sympathetic: Remy de Gourmont offered the saving paradox that political decline often coincided with aesthetic refinement, and hence that decadence might be a precondition of renewal. The accumulated bookishness of the centuries, the *littérature* of which Verlaine was so self-consciously conscious, had increased the modern need for isolating and purifying the poetic essence. All the Symbolists, in their differing ways, were poets' poets. To speak of them as if they constituted a school of thought, in any uniform sense, would belie their commitment to individuality. Yet in discussing such individuals as have contributed most to the movement, we are bound to be struck by the interfusion of artistic practice and critical theory.

Our intermediary is Baudelaire's intercessor, Edgar Allen Poe. The cycle of his extraordinary influence was rounded out a few years ago by T. S. Eliot's Library of Congress lecture, "From Poe to Valéry." Yet few Americans recognize their compatriot, from the sculptural figure of Mallarmé, as having given *un sens plus pur* to our tribal language. On the contrary, the style of Poe's tales is a highly demotic sort of magician's patter, garishly bedecked with vague French words like *outré*, *recherché*, and *bizarre*, which Baudelaire has properly disregarded in his fine translation. And Poe's poems, which jingle in our ears with their forced refrains and fabricated place-names and far-fetched expressions dragged in for the sake of rhyme—why should Mallarmé have taken such pains to render their modicum of

meaning into elegant prose? It is easier to understand why Poe as critic, combining the principle of concentrated intensity with the analysis of calculated effect, should have made French disciples. Or even why Poe as cosmologist, a champion of reason haunted by madness, pitting his faculties of ratiocination against the mysteries of creation itself, should have impressed Valéry with his cry of *Eureka!* Clearly, it was his lifelong obsession with death which made the dedication of his tombstone a peculiarly appropriate occasion for a funeral poem by another poet; while the notorious vicissitudes of his career, symbolized in the *noir mélange* of alcoholism and witchcraft, made him an archetype of the *poète maudit*. Furthermore, in that perennial conflict between *lui-même* and *eux* which Mallarmé has embodied in the opposing quatrains of his sonnet, this particular poet is doubly cursed; his alienation from others is now definitive; for the back-drop against which he enacts his typical part is a *canevas banal* with a vengeance; it is America in all its refracted philistinism. His very name becomes generic, when pronounced as a French dissyllable: Poë, *poésie*.

Valéry brings us back to a primordial word when he insists on *poïetics*, art as making, the creative process. Classical poetics was subdivided into three categories: *poeta*, *poema*, *poesis*. Symbolist aesthetics follows a comparable pattern in its emphasis and progression. Its starting point is not so much personality as *persona*, the mask that the poet interposes between his consciousness and the world. Baudelaire, though he invoked the omen of the captive albatross, still was worldly enough to play the dandy. Mallarmé conceived his role as a priestly office, celebrated for the elect in cenobitic withdrawal. With Valéry, his academic disciple, the esoteric cult became an established church, formalistic and depersonalized. The personal course, the retreat to the opposite extreme, is spectacularly represented by Rimbaud, who pushed through and beyond the limits of poetry, and ended by ironically turning into a myth. The *invitation au voyage*, for Baudelaire, was a nostalgia for order and beauty—an exotic ideal which, through his mastery of form, he could impose upon the Spleen of every-day existence. Rimbaud's voyages were flights from cities, escape through willed disorder, *dérèglement de tous les sens*. The poems of the *voyant* were visions or else hallucinations rather than formal rites, whereas the objective of the ritualist was to see *le hasard vaincu mot par mot*. But Mallarmé's most elaborate verbal arrangement demonstrates that words are just as contingent as dice; his ideograms deliquesce into *vers polymorphes*; and Valéry has judiciously attributed rhymed couplets to a collaboration between man and God. Perhaps the symbolist is most aptly compared to the alchemist, whose quest for elusive perfection is a religious observance as well as a scientific experiment. *L'alchimie du verbe* will produce—or so he hopes—the *Grand Œuvre*, the ultimate distillation and the alembicated quintessence, be it philosophers' stone or poets' elixir.

Symbolism, according to Carlyle, involves both revelation and conceal-

ment. When everything is revealed, we need no symbols; when it remains concealed, we have none. To this extent all art is more or less symbolic—less so when men are satisfied with tangible realities, more so when they are preoccupied with transcendent ideals. The history of poetry, from the Middle Ages to last century, might well be written in terms of emergence from and reversion to a symbolistic state of mind; and the change of direction might explain the difference between Dante's revelations and Baudelaire's concealments, between *le symbolisme qui sait* and *le symbolisme qui cherche*. We catch Baudelaire at the turning point if we glance at his portrait in Courbet's *Atelier du peintre*, a painting which is meaningfully subtitled *Allégorie réelle*. But the latter-day poet obscurely gropes toward such manifestations of cosmic order as were clearly presupposed by medieval allegory. In the dark forest the sounds he hears are confused; letters and colors do not always blend in synaesthetic harmony: paradise, artificially conjured up by drugs, is more evanescent than the long season in hell. The only correspondences he can trust are those by which he links his private universe to his literary medium. Here, in the psychology of the imagination, symbolism casts its greatest light. In its oscillation between extremes, it comprehends both the visionary and the intellectual; it emphasizes spontaneous inspiration, on the one hand, and perfectionist craftsmanship on the other; it neutralizes the critical antithesis between *μανία* and *εμφροιά*, Dionysiac fury and Apollonian intelligence, as mutually exclusive sources of poetry. Even Valéry, though his hero is the cerebral M. Teste, takes the Pythoness as his tormented heroine. And the oracle that causes and eases her torments is the power of speech itself, as a mean between human thought and brute existence.

Harvard University

## BAUDELAIRE'S REVOLUTIONARY POETICS

By Judd D. Hubert

BAUDELAIRE usually thought of himself as an orthodox Romantic, adhering in every precept to the school of Vigny, Hugo, and Delacroix; and many of his contemporaries, including the great Sainte-Beuve himself, considered him as an extremist among the Romantics, as an eccentric belonging to the lunatic fringe of the movement. Today, however, Baudelaire is regarded not so much as a Romantic but rather as the first of the Symbolists and perhaps as the first modern poet. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a single contemporary school of poetry that, in one way or another, does not lead back to Baudelaire. From the standpoint of poetic technique, the Mallarmean paradox of creative sterility, Rimbaud's *dérèglement de tous les sens*, Laforgue's irony and wit, Apollinaire's multiplication of emotional levels are implicit in the *Fleurs du mal*, though apparently foreign to the works of Baudelaire's immediate predecessors, such as Vigny, Hugo, or Gautier, the single exception being Nerval, at least in the sonnets and the later stories. It would almost seem that M. Jacques Maritain is completely justified in asserting that with Baudelaire poetry, for the first time, becomes conscious of itself.<sup>1</sup>

Maritain's theory presupposes in the poetry of Baudelaire more than ordinary originality, a quality eminently possessed by his Romantic predecessors: indeed, a radically new insight into the nature of poetry, which cannot be entirely accounted for in terms of literary history. It is our intention, in this paper, to circumscribe, as closely as possible, the problem or rather the mystery of Baudelaire's poetic originality and in so doing stress the revolutionary nature of his *Fleurs du mal*.

Although Baudelaire was perhaps the most perceptive critic of his time, and certainly the least fallible, not only in his own domain of literature, but also in painting and even music, there are only the faintest hints, throughout his writings, about the revolutionary character of his own poetry. He does not appear to regard himself as being in any way different, as an artist, from Vigny, Gautier, or Poe, all of whom, as he was, were endowed with the transcendent and mystical gifts characteristic of true Romantic poets, such as immediate insight into the nature of reality, knowledge of the correspondences, and even infallibility. . . . Moreover, his own pronouncements about the *Fleurs du mal* are far from revealing and appear to be contradictory. He did, however, on several occasions, threaten to disclose his trade secrets, notably in a letter to his editor:

In the second edition, which I shall call the definitive edition, I intend to include, in addition to ten or fifteen new poems, a long preface in which I shall explain my

1. *Frontières de la poésie* (Paris: Rouart, 1935).

method with all its gimmicks and teach everyone how to do just as well. And if I lack the courage to write this serious buffoonery, Th. Gautier's excellent article can serve as preface.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the irony of this passage, we sense a strong awareness on the part of Baudelaire that he possessed a poetic system or method that could be taught, perhaps in the same manner as foreshortening or the impressionistic technique in painting. The very humor of the passage shows how far Baudelaire is from the Parnassians, who regarded the poet's craft as sacred. Baudelaire did, as a matter of fact, attempt to write this preface, this *serious buffoonery*, in order to show:

How poetry is akin to music by a prosody whose very roots plunge more deeply into the soul of man than is indicated in any classical theory.

How, like the Latin and English languages, French poetry possesses a mysterious and unrecognized prosody.

Why a poet who does not know exactly how many rimes belong to a given word, is incapable of expressing any idea whatsoever.

How any man, who will make use of my principles and of the knowledge that I take it upon myself to impart to him in twenty lessons, will be able to put together a tragedy of no greater mediocrity than any other or a poem as lengthy and as boring as any epic ever written.<sup>3</sup>

More revealing perhaps than Baudelaire's own, mocking assertions is Léon Cladel's amusing, and certainly exaggerated account, of the poet's working methods. He tells how Baudelaire, in his pursuit of the *mot juste*, would make use of his knowledge of classical and modern languages, refusing to spurn the least promising etymologies or derivatives.<sup>4</sup> This account is partly confirmed by a letter to A. de Calonne in which Baudelaire, with an amazing display of erudition, explained and defended the use of the word *gouge* in "Danse macabre."<sup>5</sup> This emphasis on precision appears fairly often in Baudelaire's aesthetic theories, for instance:

Chance has no place in the arts, not any more than in mechanics. A happy find is merely the result of sound reasoning, in which some of the deductive steps are occasionally left out, in the same manner that an error is the result of an erroneous principle.<sup>6</sup>

Baudelaire, however, like many a Romantic before him, asserted the importance of the imagination, but in so doing took great care to stress the intellectual rather than the emotional aspects of this all-embracing faculty:

2. *Correspondance* (Paris: Conard), II, 105. (All translations from the French are the author's.)

3. *Les Fleurs du mal, Edition critique par Crépet & Blin* (Paris: Corti, 1942), p. 212.

4. In Crépet, E. et J., *Baudelaire* (Paris: Messein, 1928), pp. 235ff.

5. *Correspondance*, II, 264.

6. *Œuvres* (Paris: Pléiade, 1932), II, 77.

For years, I have been repeating that the poet is sovereignly intelligent, that he possesses the very essence of intelligence, and that the *imagination* is the most intellectual of the faculties, for imagination alone can grasp universal analogy or, as it is termed by certain mystics, correspondence.<sup>7</sup>

It would appear therefore, according to Baudelaire, that although the writing of poetry is based on the lesser intellectual virtues of precision and artifice, it is also involved—and this is one of the fundamental beliefs of Romantic aesthetics—with the very nature of reality. There is no reason why we should see a fundamental contradiction between the highly metaphysical declaration of principle just quoted and Baudelaire's abortive prefaces, even though these texts may express quite different attitudes and vary considerably in tone, for in every case the stress is placed on the *intellectual* activity of the poet.

Now the great poets of the previous generation believed, just as strongly as Baudelaire, in this intellectual superiority of the poet. For them, the poet was a divinely chosen, but more or less isolated, seer with a moral and even a social mission, as can be seen in Vigny's "Bouteille à la mer" or in Hugo's "Melancholia." But the poetry itself is scarcely more than the vehicle or instrument of their higher intelligence, their lofty visions, their deep-felt emotions, their all-embracing humanity, all of which is of course connected with their claim to divine inspiration. Paradoxically, their attitude to the reader resembles that of the eighteenth-century *Philosophes*, whose traditional optimism is thereby kept alive, for instead of attempting to spread the enlightenment in the rational sense, they are endeavoring to convert the public to their own emotional credo. There is a vast gulf fixed between Hugo's exclamation in the preface to the *Contemplations*: "O insensé lecteur qui crois que je ne suis pas toi!"—and Baudelaire's sardonic, but ever so much more intimate "Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère!"

Vigny and Hugo may show remarkable intellectual insight in the ideas they express and great skill in the elaboration or composition of their poetry, but somehow these two types of intelligence, ever present in French Romantic poetry, tend to remain separate. As a result, the poet's supposed vision will always be deemed superior, even by himself, to what he has actually set down in writing and his capacity as seer or thinker will inevitably transcend his ability as an artist. It is probably for this reason that French Romantic poetry can so rarely become *poésie pure*, in the sense of Valéry. The poet frequently gets in the way of his own poetic creation, and fairly often Lamartine, Vigny, and Hugo are even physically present in their poems: vertical, noble, posing and posturing in the grand manner, like so many of the citizen-statues of their time. As a result, the personality of the writer, in this type of poetry, is rarely if ever subordinated

7. *Correspondance*, I, 130.



to the poem itself, whereas, in the *Fleurs du mal*, Baudelaire takes great care to adapt his own emotions and attitudes to the poetic effect desired or envisaged. In this respect, Baudelaire's revolution consists to a great extent in denying any special privileges to his ego, particularly when using the first person singular; for he uses his own personal emotions and experience as the subject matter of, or pretext for, his poetry. In this respect, it hardly matters that Baudelaire, at one moment, exclaimed that he put his whole being into his poetry—including his religion (travestied)—and asserted at another that, in the manner of a perfect actor, he had to fashion his mind to every sophism and every corruption.<sup>8</sup> Each of these statements reveals some of the truth, but neither has any direct bearing on the poetry. In fact, in spite of their apparent contradiction, they both suggest the idea of distortion: to fashion one's mind in accordance with the sophisms and corruptions of other people, or to travesty one's religious beliefs, would be equally indicative of poetic transformation, a characteristic tendency of the *Fleurs du mal*. And indeed, if the poet's chief object is poetic transformation, it scarcely matters whether the subject matter or pretext of his poem be his own religion or the false beliefs of others.

Baudelaire's attitude towards poetry or beauty, which is one of self-denial and even self-abasement, closely resembles the mystic's self-effacement before God, whereas the Romantics' use of poetry to communicate or heighten their visions, feelings, and ideas, would seem to indicate self-assertion and, in a strictly limited sense, pride. For the Romantics, only the poet really counts; for Baudelaire, only the poetry; and for Gautier, who is neither a mystic like Baudelaire nor a true believer like Hugo or Vigny, only the outward manifestations of the cult can have true value.

Let us not forget, however, that Baudelaire greatly admired these older poets, especially Vigny and Gautier. His attitude towards Hugo was ambivalent, for on one occasion he accused him of being an academician who achieved his richest effects through rhetoric—and apparently not through this *sorcellerie évocatoire* which is the basis of all true poetry and all great painting.<sup>9</sup> But then, what is this *sorcellerie évocatoire*, so characteristic of the *Fleurs du mal*, this poetic imagination so akin to intelligence, these poetic recipes that Baudelaire nearly revealed; finally, what is this poetic revolution mentioned in the title of the paper? It would no doubt be more convincing to follow Vivier's or Pommier's lead and through careful, painstaking source-criticism show how Baudelaire harks back to the past, both in his poetry and in his philosophy, a method which would reduce the problem of Baudelaire's originality to a question of personal idiosyncrasy and individual experience. Instead, we shall indulge from now on in a mass of conjectural interpretation based on a close reading of several poems. The texts selected, you will notice, are all in the first person singular, in

8. *Edition critique*, p. 507.

9. *Salon de 1848*, *Œuvres*, II, 76.



order to bring out, as clearly as possible, the difference in method between the *Fleurs du mal* and the lyrical outbursts or self-dramatization, so characteristic of the Romantic school.

It is not in his tastes or even in his aesthetic theories that Baudelaire is at variance with his predecessors, but only in his poetic elaboration, his consistent use of symbols and technical devices. "L'Idéal," in its praise of the baroque power of Michelangelo and Shakespeare, in its *élan* towards the infinite, remains in fundamental agreement with the Victor Hugo of the preface to *Cromwell*:

Ce ne seront jamais ces beautés de vignettes,  
Produits avariés, nés d'un siècle vaurien,  
Ces pieds à brodequins, ces doigts à castagnettes,  
Qui sauront satisfaire un cœur comme le mien.

Je laisse à Gavarni, poète des chloroses,  
Son troupeau gazouillant de beautés d'hôpital,  
Car je ne puis trouver parmi ces pâles roses  
Une fleur qui ressemble à mon rouge idéal.

Ce qu'il faut à ce cœur profond comme un abîme,  
C'est vous, Lady Macbeth, âme puissante au crime,  
Rêve d'Eschyle éelos au climat des autans;

Ou bien toi, grande Nuit, fille de Michel-Ange,  
Qui tors paisiblement dans une pose étrange  
Tes appas façonnés aux bouches des Titans!

In both content and structure, this sonnet is neatly divided into two parts: in the quatrains, the poet rejects through irony the sickly vulgarity of his contemporaries, and in the tercets, he affirms with the utmost intensity his own romantic ideal. Baudelaire's attitude towards the *beautés de vignettes* and the *beautés d'hôpital*—and the repetitive use of the word "beauty" is definitely ironic—seems rather ambiguous, for it is not quite clear whether he rejects them as works of art or as women. The expression *produits avariés* suggests that the *beautés de vignettes* are not only the spoiled artistic products of a worthless century, but diseased women—unworthy, in either capacity, to satisfy the heart of the poet. They may satisfy the artist Gavarni, who designed so many of these *vignettes*, and whose beauties suffer from chlorosis, an illness popularly called *pâles couleurs*, but they will nonetheless meet their end in the poor ward of a hospital, like aged prostitutes. As a representation of the ideal, this crowd of sickly and colorless females, with their mincing gestures and their castanets, cannot compare with the individual and sombre intensity of Lady Macbeth or Michelangelo's Night. Indeed, the poet's reaction becomes more and more intense as it progresses from the ironic rejection of the seedy artefacts of his own day to a whole-hearted acceptance of beauty; *cœur—rouge idéal—cœur profond comme un abîme*. The slightly erotic connotations, which appear

now and then in the sonnet, and especially in the line: *appas façonnés aux bouches des Titans*—in which the word *bouches* can refer not only to the forge where the Titans might have cast such a statue, but also to the mouths of these same Titans—give a semblance of life to these works of art and therefore to the ideal; moreover, they suggest that Baudelaire accepts Lady Macbeth and "La Nuit" as women as well as artistic creations, in the same way that he rejected the vulgar beauties of the quatrains.

Hidden comparisons with flowers lend a symbolic quality to the poet's acceptance or rejection. In the first quatrain, the *vignettes* can refer not only to engravings found in books, but also to various types of small flowers having laxative properties. Gavarni's hospital beauties are compared with pale roses, among which the poet cannot discover a blossom resembling his red (full-blooded) ideal, or, if you wish, his ideal redness, depending upon whether *rouge* or *idéal* is taken as a noun. In the first tercet, the use of the word *éclos*—a purely floral term—heightens the simile; and in the second, Night, by her pose—*qui tors paisiblement dans une pose étrange*—evokes the peaceful contortion of some exotic and ever so slightly erotic flower. These floral comparisons appear to be symbolic only in the sense that they can refer, as the title of the work (*Fleurs du mal*) would suggest, to poetry itself: all these women, from the *produits avariés* of a worthless century to Michelangelo's Night, represent varying degrees of poetic beauty and intensity.

Strangely enough, we find the same type of metaphor and of erotic suggestion in the first and in the second part, the relationship among these various elements remaining approximately the same throughout. The only variant is of course poetic intensity, which increases almost geometrically until it culminates in the last line of the sonnet. The presence of the poet himself within this poem—the use of the first person singular—has a definite artistic function, for it determines a poetic constant, thanks to which the disproportion between the vulgarity of the century and the absolute nature of the ideal can be expressed with the utmost brevity.

Baudelaire's preoccupation with poetic creation—with the creation of the ideal—which plays so important a part in the sonnet just discussed, is ever present in the *Fleurs du mal*. It appears in a multitude of forms, and more often than not in poems where one would least expect it, notably in the "realistic" *Tableaux parisiens*. In "Le Soleil" the sun and Paris itself become symbolic of the creative activity of the poet:

Le long du vieux faubourg, où pendent aux masures  
Les persiennes, abri des secrètes luxures,  
Quand le soleil cruel frappe à traits redoublés  
Sur la ville et les champs, sur les toits et les blés,  
Je vais m'exercer seul à ma fantasque escrime,  
Flairant dans tous les coins les hasards de la rime,  
Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés,  
Heurtant parfois des vers depuis longtemps rêvés.

In the first two lines, it almost seems as if the old street wished to share the voluptuousness and even the sinfulness of mankind, for there appears to be a definite suggestion of complicity in the attitude of the blinds, which both hide and protect the people inside, as well as a hint of eroticism in the expression *pendent aux masures*—cling to the hovels. The fact that the human beings involved remain hidden and that their activity is expressed in abstract terms: *secrètes luxures*, makes the inanimate world seem much more alive and conscious than humanity. The apparently conscious cruelty of the sun, which, like a God of vengeance, is castigating the city, increases this subtle attribution of human or even superhuman characteristics to the outside world. The poet himself shares the cruelty of the sun, for he compares his creative activity to fencing, to duelling. But this artistic activity probably causes more suffering to himself than to the city, as the words *trébuchant* (stumbling) and *heurtant* (bumping) would seem to indicate. The sun is definitely the true aggressor, while the poet remains forever a sort of victim. In this respect "Le Soleil" reminds one of a passage in "Le Confiteur de l'artiste": "the pursuit of beauty is a duel in which the poet cries out in fear before going down in defeat."

In spite of the brilliant sunlight, the hero goes stumbling along, not so much in the city streets, as in the dark corners of his imagination. Ironically, the outside world, whether it be the sun or the city, contributes very little to poetic creation, for all Baudelaire can really discover in his wanderings are these *vers depuis longtemps rêvés*, these products of his own dream world, which has all the solidity of the city and much more reality than Paris itself.

Paris, which shares the sinful pleasures of humanity and which becomes the scene of the poet's creative activity must however coincide with the inner world of Baudelaire of which it is the symbol: these dark corners where he tries to uncover the missing rime—*Flairant dans tous les coins les hasards de la rime*—exist, as we have already suggested, in his own mind, rather than in the Paris streets. It is in this manner that Baudelaire can accomplish the utter subjection of the outside world to his own inner creation. Moreover, there is probably a meaningful analogy between the *secrètes luxures*, which remain hidden to the sun, and the various missing elements of the poem which Baudelaire is pursuing through the city streets—a strange analogy which, by the way, gives added meaning to the title of the whole book: the *Fleurs du mal*.

Even more than in "L'Idéal," the notion of beauty remains closely associated with the presence of eroticism, disease, cruelty, suffering, and sin. Suffering, as Baudelaire has often repeated, is a necessary ingredient of beauty; and this idea is much more than a metaphysical principle or the expression of personal feelings, for it corresponds to his practice as an artist. Suffering and cruelty, ever present in the *Fleurs du mal*, are the chief means whereby Baudelaire can submit the outside world as well as his own

experiences and emotions to his artistic creation. Through sheer violence, he manages to destroy the barrier which separates these two realms, and in so doing lays the foundation of modern poetry.

From the standpoint of this relationship between these two realms, "Le Cygne," which stresses the superiority of the past over the present, is a most revealing work. It will suffice, for our purposes, to quote the following fragments:

Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville  
Change plus vite, hélas! que le cœur d'un mortel);

It would be interesting to contrast these two lines with Hugo's "Tristesse d'Olympio," in which the hero finds upon his return that everything has remained unchanged except himself. Baudelaire's statement appears at first glance as a sort of maxim or truism, and yet it seems to express the very opposite of Hugo's "Tristesse d'Olympio," of Lamartine's "Lac" and many other Romantic poems where a single misfortune can transform the hero's attitude towards unchanging nature. It is true of course that all these works, including Baudelaire's, reveal a discrepancy between the poet and his surroundings. Baudelaire's maxim need not however be logically or even psychologically true, for it is a purely poetic statement, quite impervious to the law of non-contradiction or the precepts of psychology: it serves to suggest that the outside world, like Heraclitus' river, is in perpetual flux, whereas the heart of a mortal, that is, his inner activity, his memories, alone has true stability and can be regarded as real. This theme is developed more clearly later in the poem:

Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie  
N'a bougé! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,  
Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie,  
Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs.

Even the most solid and permanent elements in this perpetually changing and unreal city—new palaces, scaffoldings, building blocks, old streets, are transformed into intangible allegories, into poetic symbols, whereas, by a masterly use of false attribution, the memories acquire all the solidity usually ascribed to city buildings—*Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs*. In this manner, the petrified stability of the metropolis becomes paradoxically the chief characteristic of the inner mind, where it replaces duration and evanescence. The world of memory, the world of absence thus becomes the supreme reality. This stress placed on the inner world of the poet, as opposed to his actual surroundings, remains to a certain extent a romantic feature—a feature which will play so great a part in Bergson's philosophy of duration and intuition. It is not therefore in this respect that Baudelaire differs from Lamartine or Hugo, but rather in the conscious and objective manner, by which he brings about the triumph of

this all important inner reality, which is so much more than his own personal reality, for it embraces all poetry and all art.

Like Hugo, to whom he dedicated his most gruesome poem "Les Sept Vieillards," Baudelaire was particularly interested in the supernatural. Hugo's ghost poems, such as "Ce que disait la bouche d'ombre," which are probably among his very best and certainly among his most impressive works, express an attitude rather than a feeling of terror. The barrier between the inner world and outside reality is maintained throughout, and as a result the barrier between the poet and his reader is rarely if ever breached: we are struck and often subdued by Hugo's thundering verse and by the infinite resources of his imagination, but somehow we are never really awed. Baudelaire's "Sept Vieillards," on the contrary, is thoroughly disquieting—much more frightening than anything Hugo ever wrote or perhaps imagined. The first few lines set the tone of the whole poem:

Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,  
Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant!  
Les mystères partout coulent comme des sèves  
Dans les canaux étroits du colosse puissant.

From the very beginning, the city appears as full of dreams, nightmares, and ghosts. As Eliot says, the city is unreal; but it is crawling—*fourmillante*—with all the figments of a disordered imagination. The spectre who stops the passer-by might be a conventional ghost who usually haunts the midnight hour in Romantic melodramas, or else some dangerous aspect of the soul, similar to ennui, to spleen. The narrow canals of the powerful colossus may refer just as readily to the streets or arteries of old Paris as to the arterial system of this colossus, this giant, whose very presence in the poem tends to transform the city and all its ramifications into one enormous ghost. The analogy between Paris and a giant figure inevitably leads to a comparison between the haunted poet and the city, for the mysteries that flow through the arteries of the metropolis are bound to coincide with the terrifying inner life of the poet. This resemblance or identity becomes more obvious in the following stanzas:

Un matin, cependant que dans la triste rue  
Les maisons, dont la brume allongeait la hauteur,  
Simulaient les deux quais d'une rivière accrue,  
Et que, décor semblable à l'âme de l'acteur,

Un brouillard sale et jaune inondait tout l'espace,  
Je suivais, roidissant mes nerfs comme un héros  
Et discutant avec mon âme déjà lasse,  
Le faubourg secoué par les lourds tombereaux.

The sad street is transformed by the fog into a swollen river, or more precisely into a canal overflowing with terrifying, diabolical mysteries. The



reality of the city is completely abolished, for the fog both increases in height and distorts the buildings, as in some El Greco painting. Moreover, the expression *simulaient* suggests that these city buildings, in the manner of a troupe of actors, are trying to imitate an overflowing stream. The dirty yellow fog that fills the street resembles the soul of the actor—of the poet as well as of the colossus, for everyone involved seems to be playing a part, and even making a parody or a travesty of one another. The identity between the city and the poet, between the actor and the scene, becomes so perfect that they can scarcely be distinguished. It is at this moment that seven hideous old men appear one after the other in order to terrify the poet:

Tout à coup un vieillard dont les guenilles jaunes  
Imitaient la couleur de ce ciel pluvieux,  
Et dont l'aspect aurait fait pleuvoir les aumônes,  
Sans la méchanceté qui luisait dans ses yeux,

M'apparut.

Each old man is clad in dirty yellow rags in imitation or travesty of the fog and the rain, and each one is perfectly angular: *Il n'était pas voûté mais cassé, son échine/Faisant avec sa jambe un parfait angle droit . . .*, so much so that these old men seem to imitate the angularity of the buildings or of the heavy carts (*tombereaux*) which rumble through the streets. And like these carts, they follow each other at regular intervals. We see in this succession of old men the perfect embodiment of the city as it is recreated within the haunted soul of the poet.

These *sept vieillards* do much more than reproduce as in hallucinations various aspects of the haunted city:

Aurais-je, sans mourir, contemplé le huitième,  
Sosie inexorable, ironique et fatal,  
Dégoutant Phénix, fils et père de lui-même?

This disgusting Phoenix, son and father of himself, is no less than a caricature of God himself, and hence an embodiment of the devil. We might even say that the old men, who are figments of the poet's disordered imagination, originate both in the outward aspects of Paris and in Hell. The presence of the poet within this work serves to tie these various, disparate elements and levels together by bringing out their hidden resemblances or analogies. Until the conclusion, the poet appears to be walking along the *faubourg* and therefore maintains some relationship with the outside world, but in the last stanza everything goes out of control:

Vainement ma raison voulait prendre la barre;  
La tempête en jouant déroutait ses efforts,  
Et mon âme dansait, dansait, vieille gabarre  
Sans mâts, sur une mer monstrueuse et sans bords!

The city has disappeared—its overflowing canals give way to an ocean of terror which destroys the last vestige of reason within the poet. Sheer horror thus submerges the world within and the world without, but by a strange paradox this horror, this evil, becomes the every essence of poetry, and the total destruction which characterizes the last stanza coincides with the complete dominance of the poetic element: it is truly a flower of evil.

The worst of all evils, however, is—according to Baudelaire—*ennui*, a feeling, if it can be so termed, that reappears constantly in the *Fleurs du mal*, and from which he is known to have suffered throughout his life. We might therefore expect that the “spleen” poems would be among his least objective, and that their poetic quality would stem from the completely sincere expression of a deeply felt emotion. Paradoxically, these “spleen” poems are not only the most personal but the most artfully contrived in the *Fleurs du mal*, differing in this respect from Lamartine’s or even Hugo’s lyrical expressions of melancholy and sadness. Baudelaire’s *ennui* is a particularly destructive type of melancholy, and as such offers great advantages to the poet who would break down the mythical barrier which separates the subjective from the objective world. With *ennui* as a tool, a poet can reduce the outside world to a pulp, and his own subjectivity to complete deprivation, and still by this very act increase the intensity of his poetry, which, like mysticism, thrives on immolation and negation. We have selected the second poem entitled “Spleen” as being the most typical and probably the most personal in the group:

J’ai plus de souvenirs que si j’avais mille ans.

Un gros meuble à tiroirs encombré de bilans,  
De vers, de billets doux, de procès, de romances,  
Avec de lourds cheveux roulés dans des quittances,  
Cache moins de secrets que mon triste cerveau.  
C’est une pyramide, un immense caveau,  
Qui contient plus de morts que la fosse commune.  
—Je suis un cimetière abhorré de la lune,  
Où comme des remords se traînent de longs vers  
Qui s’acharnent toujours sur mes morts les plus chers.

The very first line, separated from the rest of the poem, indicates the theme: the disproportion between time and memory—between the mind and a lifetime of experience. We have the feeling that a vast accumulation of disparate memories clutters up the mind of the poet. Baudelaire then develops through a series of metaphors, the idea of the mind as a container. It appears first as a large desk whose drawers overflow with the dead symbols of the past—love notes, lawyer’s briefs, romances, locks of hair, receipts. And yet this cluttered desk, this *secrétaire* or container of secrets, in which we can see the first poetic representation of the poet’s skull, is not a perfectly adequate symbol for his mind, for he then proceeds to identify it with still



larger containers: a pyramid, an immense vault which contains more bodies than the common burial ground. In every one of these metaphors, there can be no real relationship between the container and the contained, no more than between the mind and its memories. Furthermore, all the objects contained are utterly devoid of life. The next variation on the theme does, however, give a semblance of life to these symbols of memories. In the ghostly cemetery abhorred by the moon, which is definitely the largest representation of the skull, these memories are transformed into remorse: long worms continually attacking the dead who were dearest to the poet. As the representations of the skull increase in size and in importance, the life-in-death which takes place within becomes more and more intense, starting with the contents of a desk and reaching a climax in these voracious worms.

In the next section of the poem, the symbols of memory become more artistic and more human:

Je suis un vieux boudoir plein de roses fanées,  
Où gît tout un fouillis de modes surannées,  
Où les pastels plaintifs et les pâles Boucher,  
Seuls, respirent l'odeur d'un flacon débouché.

The comparison of the poet's mind or skull with a boudoir—etymologically a room for sulking—brings a new note into the poem. Death adopts a more pleasant form, that of an old-fashioned room full of the superannuated beauty of the eighteenth century. The past has become artistic, poetic in its own right. In this barely remembered world, human characteristics are attributed to the objects scattered about: the verb *gît*, usually found in the expression *ci-gît* (here lies), evokes the idea of death, suggesting at the same time that this chaotic collection of objects, being human, has a personality of its own. The pastels are plaintive, the Bouchers pale, like unhappy women, and both breathe the faded fragrance of a long opened bottle of perfume, which is just another container symbolizing memory and the mind.

Suddenly, time, which has become a small dry thing lost in the skull of the poet, becomes extended to infinity:

Rien n'égale en longueur les boiteuses journées,  
Quand sous les lourds flocons des neigeuses années  
L'ennui, fruit de la morne incuriosité,  
Prend les proportions de l'immortalité.  
—Désormais tu n'es plus, ô matière vivante!  
Qu'un granit entouré d'une vague épouvante,  
Assoupi dans le fond d'un Sahara brumeux;  
Un sphinx ignoré du monde insoucieux,  
Oublié sur la carte, et dont l'humeur farouche  
Ne chante qu'aux rayons du soleil qui se couche.

Time itself is endowed with human characteristics: lame, stumbling days. As a result, the poet's mind is within time, and becomes in its turn a small, dry thing surrounded by infinity, which makes the reversal between container and contents complete. Living matter—life itself—is transformed into a block of granite, symbolizing the skull, surrounded by impalpable fear, asleep in a misty Sahara. The block of granite then assumes a more precise form, that of the ambiguous Sphinx, the final symbol of Baudelaire's situation, lost in infinite time, isolated among his contemporaries, singing only at sunset or at the end of time.

It is through the poet's presence in this work that the idea of a disproportion between time and events can be maintained throughout and that the dramatic reversal between the container and its contents can be brought about so suddenly. This poem expresses much more than the lyrical or personal feeling of, *ennui* more than the poet's isolation or sterility; it possesses a well defined structure and thereby establishes a definite relationship between the subjective and the objective world. More perhaps than in any other of the *Fleurs du mal*, the poet's presence serves to break down the barrier which separates these two forms of reality. In a sense, Baudelaire makes use, in a single work of art, of both the idealistic and the realistic representations of the world; and he accomplishes this mainly through the instrumentality of the first person singular.

It remains to be seen whether Baudelaire can maintain his poetic objectivity in the expression of a more positive feeling such as love. For that purpose, I have selected one of the most intense of the *Fleurs du mal*:

Une nuit que j'étais près d'une affreuse Juive,  
Comme au long d'un cadavre un cadavre étendu,  
Je me pris à songer près de ce corps vendu  
A la triste beauté dont mon désir se prive.

Je me représentai sa majesté native,  
Son regard de vigueur et de grâces armé,  
Ses cheveux qui lui font un casque parfumé,  
Et dont le souvenir pour l'amour me ravive.

Car j'eusse avec ferveur baisé ton noble corps,  
Et depuis tes pieds frais jusqu'à tes noires tresses  
Déroulé le trésor des profondes caresses,

Si, quelque soir, d'un pleur obtenu sans effort  
Tu pouvais seulement, ô reine des cruelles!  
Obscurcir la splendeur de tes froides prunelles.

By a strange poetic paradox, the hero seems to be as far away from the prostitute lying at his side as from the sad beauty whom he dare not approach. In spite of her proximity to the poet, the *affreuse Juive* is morally

and erotically rejected, all the more so as the poet compares both the woman and himself to *cadavres*. One might even use a mathematical metaphor here: the poet's closeness to the *corps vendu* is in inverse ratio to her attraction for him. The very opposite appears to be true of his relationship with the *triste beauté*, who spatially is far away, but whose attraction for him could scarcely increase. The poet, by maintaining in this manner the balance between the two women, prevents the sonnet from becoming in any way pornographic.

There is, moreover, a marked contrast between these two women. The prostitute is corrupt and morally dead, whereas the sad beauty is compared with a warrior: her native majesty; her noble, as opposed to venal, body; her expression (*regard*) armed with grace and vigor; her helmet-like hair; and finally the splendor of her icy eyes (*froides prunelles*), which she refuses to dim with a tear, prevent the poet from approaching her. Eroticism is therefore vanquished and poetically rejected less by distance than by the impenetrable armor of the *triste beauté*, who can remain utterly inaccessible while becoming supremely attractive. As a result, the charms of the sad beauty assume, by means of her military superiority over the poet and the prostitute and her ability to withstand the strongest passion, a nearly transcendent value. The *triste beauté*, in spite of the hero's obvious desire for her body, can, like Dante's Beatrice or Petrarch's Laura, symbolize the ideal.

In this sonnet, which is a masterpiece of contrast and proportion, Baudelaire through the dramatic use of the first person singular is able to establish a perfectly balanced system of rejection and attraction, of proximity and distance, of vulgarity and idealism. It is chiefly through the use of self-abasement that he manages to transform the physical attraction of his mulatto mistress into a representation of the ideal. Without utter self-abasement, this magical transformation would have been impossible, and it is for this very reason that it can be so misleading to discuss Baudelaire's use of the first person or even his poetry in general in terms of sincerity or insincerity. The Baudelairean revolution in poetry is based upon the complete subjection of the world in every form to the poetic reality which must be created at any cost.

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## A VIEW OF MALLARMÉ'S POETICS

By Warren Ramsey

APPROACHING these poems and this art of poetry which have gone on yielding new meanings for most of a century now, we welcome all the flexibility of our guiding term. Mallarmé's poetry both illustrates and formulates, at different times, different sets of harmonious principles. Baudelaire having been dealt with, we can pass more rapidly than we otherwise would over the first phase, where Baudelaire's ideas were often at work. We must not fail to notice there, however, that sharpening of the visual objective, that conception of perfectible form and that notion of "une vanité et une profanation gratuites . . . dans l'aveu public des angoisses du cœur . . ." which we commonly call Parnassian—a high-sounding name for so much plain *expertise* passed on into the later century, but one that will do. When Mallarmé came to write what many believe to be his most important *art poétique*, "Toast Funèbre," transforming much that had been inert in the old poetics, it began as homage to Théophile Gautier. And it is interesting to remember apropos of Gautier, the real master of the Parnassians and the younger Mallarmé but pretty much without honor in France of late, that foreign reading of a poet can really be useful. No doubt Ezra Pound overestimated Gautier. Probably most of us readers of Pound, at one time or another, overestimated Gautier too. But what would have happened to Gautier *tel qu'en lui-même* without our native appreciation of the sharp contour, if we may so call it—if we had left Gautier to the charities of André Gide? Surely this is another case, along with that of Poe, of the stone that the builder had been on the point of rejecting. Though we have been, on the whole, poor readers of Mallarmé, for much the same reason that made us overenthusiastic readers of Gautier, I believe that all of us here can collaborate effectively on a sort of *Mallarmé vu d'ici*, to alter slightly the title of an essay Mallarmé devoted to Tennyson. At least we have the fine and stimulating recent examples of Wallace Fowlie, Gardner Davies and Robert Greer Cohn to show that it can be done.

In the paper leading to our general discussion I should like to follow Mallarmé's art of poetry through two phases familiar to every student of his work, the first, more or less imitative one, and the second, "springing from a very new poetics," as the poet himself said. Then, drawing on your patience, a quality that is of the essence in Mallarmé's poetics from one end to the other, I should like to point toward a "tiers aspect" or third zone which the principles of "Toast Funèbre" and most of the later sonnets do not exhaust. There poetry revolves upon itself, there poetic process, seen as the highest mode of cognition, witnesses and establishes fundamental linkings between the self and the world. At that point it becomes clear, or becomes clear to me, that we are dealing not only with a major poet of c.

1885 but with one of the representative poets of the century. "Prose pour des Esseintes," "Mes bouquins refermés sur le nom de Paphos" and *Un Coup de dés* need to be considered particularly in this connection. But in all these attempts to gauge what seems to me a fluctuating, expanding poetic universe—rather than a stable one—I want to remain close to the poetry. For the first phase there is no body of theory except what can be deduced from the poems. As far as the second stage is concerned, the poetry is, as usual, more revealing than the poet's comment. The poems of middle maturity constitute a poetics.

If we are able to speak of the poems sent off to *Le Parnasse contemporain* in somewhat the same way as we do of a tale from *Dubliners*, we are well aware, nevertheless, of how much can be learned from early works. Some of the *Parnasse* poems were read aloud in Baudelaire's presence, and as a friend of Mallarmé's reported the occasion, somewhat breathlessly, "Baudelaire must have been pleased—otherwise he would have said something." The reason for Baudelaire's approbative silence was surely that, along with much that was repetitious of himself and others, there was something new under the sun. Such a line as the one from "L'Azur,"

Les grands trous bleus que font méchamment les oiseaux,

belongs in the essential corpus of Mallarmé's poetry. It has the serenity of this poetry which was, much more than Baudelaire's, averse to the movement that displaces lines. The adverb has the importance it has on many of Mallarmé's best pages, where it is so often the word that lifts a line to life, begins a sonnet or even serves as title for a work. "L'Azur" dates from a time when the poet was meditating about the ideal passage that would have had twenty-nine adjectives and a single verb—and the adjectives in this line are expansive. Here is the promise of a poetry infinitely expressive of the shading, substantival and adjectival rather than predicative, truly "Parnassian" in this sense, yet a kind of poetry that contrives never merely to "describe." With the adjectives and the adverb comes the calculated halting of the pure forward motion of the poem, the breaking-off for a rhetorical development already decisive. We are prepared for one of the closest of all scrutinies of the possibilities of language.

"Renouveau" begins with lines at once melodiously detached and closely bound up with the poet's conception of the conditions of his art,

Le printemps maladié a chassé tristement  
L'hiver, saison de l'art serein, l'hiver lucide . . .

Winter, symbolizing denial of the life-flow, was to be the time of the hard-won steps toward a poetry crystallizing that denial—the season of *Hérodiade*. The fine season, on the other hand, either burgeoning or arrived at the melancholy perfection of "Tristesse d'été," was an analogy—

Du sol et de la nue hostiles, ô grief!

—of vague and multiform hostility to the ideal. Summer—since Mallarmé lived his poetry—was left over for composing *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, a comparatively minor and peripheral work in the estimation of its author. "Renouveau" represents the renewal of nothing but the flow of phenomena which so afflicted any Des Esseintes. And that apparent admission of sterility,

Et, dans mon être à qui le sang morne préside  
L'impuissance s'étire en un long bâillement . . .

one of the first of the avowals with which Mallarmé was to delight adversaries who did not understand that this was poetry, admits nothing but a particularly idealistic kind of idealism. Sterility is only an extreme term for purity. "Renouveau" goes, poetically speaking, one step further than the early "Apparition" and other undisguised idealistic pieces. The avowal of sterility is comparable to that of angelism in "Les Fenêtres," where the speaker drags himself away from the diseased vitality of this world to the hospital window, where

Je me mire et me vois ange! et je meurs, et j'aime  
—Que la vitre soit l'art, soit la mysticité—

Sterility and angelism are both attitudes of the poetry. Mallarmé was neither unproductive (he *published* little) nor personally disdainful of the material conditions of experience. He was, especially at this stage, anxious that poetry should be crystal-like.

The *Parnasse* poems were given late into the author's hands as works that he thought could be dispensed with; in 1864 he had discovered what he believed to be his original and determining poetics, which bore no fruit before *Hérodias*. With all the respect due the poet's judgment, however, the new was not quite as new as he imagined, nor was the old quite as worn-out. The later Mallarmé wrote a good deal of poetry that is, in its distinctive way, representational. We have been becoming more and more conscious of how often he portrayed not the effect that a thing produces but the thing itself—sometimes in the unexpectedly direct tercet of an otherwise abstruse sonnet, more often in those occasional verses and verse letters to friends which came as easily as his poems came hard and are so very revealing of a primarily plastic imagination. This aspect of his activity shows Mallarmé as eager as other important artists of the ending century to represent, and represent with conviction, the surfaces of things, surfaces as Rodin and Rilke understood them. Reading over these poems in which Mallarmé sought, as he wrote, to paint decorations on porcelain,

Imiter le Chinois au cœur limpide et fin,

we are once more struck by the force of his poetic testimony. We are tempted, however, to spoil the meter by changing "Chinois" to "Japonais."



This was the time when the Impressionists and the Goncourts were championing Japanese art—its rich and incisive realism, its wonderfully unpretentious portrayal of everyday scenes. Mallarmé was much impressed by "Utamaro's beauties," as Wallace Stevens, one of the Americans who have understood Mallarmé best, was later to call them. In the *Parnasse* poems, in *Chansons bas*, in occasional passages of the major works, there is some of Utamaro's skill of line and some of his spirit, too, so very different from any associated with Hérodiade's tower. We find ourselves turning often to these lesser poems because they do so much to establish Mallarmé as what he was, an artist of a certain moment in history who said, "Vision et mélodie, fondues dans un charme indéci, sont la poésie même"—putting *vision* first. This artist who knew far more about painting and its resources than he did about music and its techniques, even the literary music of Wagner, did not abandon an ideal of visual suggestion while pursuing one of musical evocation. We read *Chansons bas* even more for the genre scenes than because they strike in exemplary fashion a tone—musical, if you will—that Mallarmé desired for all his poetry: "Tout, à part, bas ou pour me recueillir,"<sup>1</sup> a tone of the aside, low on the scale of dynamics, anti-declamatory. In all these little poems which glow like Japanese prints there is a realism—or, better, infra-realism, to borrow a term from Ortega—a penetration in depth toward unheroic sentiments, appearances, events, without which Mallarmé would lose some of his claims to universality.

The intactness of a poetry meant to deny the formlessness of experience is almost immediately raised to an absolute. "Comme tout ce qui est absolument beau, la poésie force l'admiration,"<sup>2</sup> Mallarmé wrote in the early "Hérésies artistiques," and the words "absolutely beautiful" are to be taken literally. The young poet takes his place unhesitatingly where only a believing mind can go. Absolute beauty is venerable. "Toute chose sacrée s'enveloppe de mystère," as Mallarmé writes in the first, peremptory sentence of the same essay, reminding us, to be sure, of Baudelaire's "Il y a dans le Verbe quelque chose de sacré . . ." but also looking forward to a much fuller elaboration of the cult of the poetic Word. Nowhere in Baudelaire is there this rigidity of predestination. Mallarmé's cult is for the elect entirely. "Les religions se retranchent à l'abri d'arcanes dévoilés au seul prédestiné: l'art a les siens."<sup>3</sup> What we have is a sort of poetic puritanism not without its witch-burnings. Mallarmé envies the technical exclusiveness of the other arts, with whose techniques the public knows it cannot meddle. He expects to cultivate, in his prose from which all Cartesian amplitude must depart, the use of mathematical terms.<sup>4</sup> So far as poetry is concerned,

1. *Propos sur la poésie*, recueillis et présentés par Henri Mondor (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1946), pp. 19 and 134.

2. "Variations sur un sujet," *Œuvres complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, p. 385.

3. *Œuvres*, p. 257.

4. *Œuvres*, p. 257.

5. "Diptyque II," *Œuvres*, p. 581.



he regrets that *Les Fleurs du mal* is bought and sold as a black and white book looking exactly like any other book. He desires for poetry "une langue immaculée," and—in terms which seem to be colored as much by Poe's fiction as by the "Poetic Principle,"—"hieratic formulas" requiring "dry study," "the gold clasps of old missals," "the inviolate hieroglyphs of papyrus rolls." And what is bound to come, meanwhile, of artistic heresies (by which Mallarmé meant one heretic, Victor Hugo, who in his book on Shakespeare takes the view that the beautiful must be the handmaiden of the true, as didactically heretical a position as possible)? Out of attempts to level poetry to the status of a science, accessible in some degree to everybody, can come only one final disgrace, "une idée inouïe et saugrenue . . . à savoir, qu'il est indispensable d'enseigner [la poésie] dans les collèges." Poetry will be taught to everybody, indiscriminately, because "... il est difficile de distinguer sous les crins ébouriffés de quel écolier blanchit l'étoile sybilline."<sup>6</sup>

It is a question to what extent the articles of poetic faith thus drawn up were ever seriously modified, to what extent they were simply draped round with the defensive graces of maturity. From the *langue immaculée* of the "Hérésies" to words and word-patterns of *Hérodiade* is a short, inevitable step. It is a longer step from the gold-clasped missals and virgin papyrus rolls to the "grimoire," the magician's book, "le livre de fer vêtu" and the magic words born for eternal parchments of "Prose pour des Es-seintes." Certainly Poe's language is still a presence there. Even the protest against physically nondescript books of poetry seems negatively prophetic of the Poe translations and *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* with illustrations by Manet, the poems so beautifully and expensively presented that Mallarmé's close friends were obliged to copy out their own books by hand. "Le Mystère dans les lettres," an essay published two years before the poet's death, re-affirms a sacrosanct poetic purity which must be cherished mysteriously, and undiluted disdain for "l'encrier sans nuit" of the writer who would disregard that purity and that mystery. The main difference between "Hérésies artistiques" and "Le Mystère dans les lettres" is that the latter is couched in a prose which has itself become involuted, mysterious, radically different from the Cartesian clarity of the early article, a prose which has undergone a development entirely parallel to that of the poetry, thereby reminding us of one of Mallarmé's most far-reaching observations: that there is no such thing as prose, there are only verses more or less compact, more or less serried.

Far more interesting than the overtopping concept of absolute poetic purity, an idea which must clearly be discussed either fundamentally or not at all, more interesting than the armature of the poetic faith, are the specifications as to what the nature of this purity, this pure language, must be. There is a preparation, a preliminary work of destruction. Words must

6. *Œuvres*, pp. 257-258.

first lose their ordinary properties, be unburdened of their usual attributes, rendered weightless, crystalline. When words have been made "sufficiently themselves to tolerate no impression from the outside, they must be reflected from one another in such a way as to seem to have no color of their own."<sup>7</sup> A fellow-poet's verse is criticized because "the words live too much with their own life."<sup>8</sup> Poetry should not be made up of *mots*, words in general or written words, at all, but rather of *paroles*, the words of speech or song capable of giving way at once before sensations. It will be remembered that the most famous formulation of this doctrine of altered speech comes in the sonnet on Poe. Over and above this, there is in Mallarmé a trace of the symbolic logician's impatience with the whole archaic business of language—an impatience immediately checked and brought round again by his great passion for language—a feeling that something other than words, or at least something besides words, might be more expressive of the poetic Idea. Hence an increasing attention to *les blancs*, the spaces between and around words, the margins, or, speaking from the musical or temporal point of view, the rests, the silences—"le significatif silence qu'il n'est pas moins beau de composer, que les vers,"<sup>9</sup> as Mallarmé said writing on Poe. The poem has shape, plastic and even temporal-musical dimension, upon the page. In more than any usual sense, Mallarmé's poems are "for the eye"—and "for the ear." And the ideographs of *Un Coup de dés* are in sight.

Most meaningful of all, perhaps, at least to Mallarmé's fellow-writers, has been Mallarmé's human example, the human record of his laborious progress toward a supreme degree of artistic integrity. In the letters we find powerful testimony to his feelings of incapacity, weariness, agonizing spiritual dryness, a long sacrifice of bitter herbs broken by the occasional, almost equally painful surge of exaltation. We find the record of the bewildering experience at Tournon, an experience which left Mallarmé seriously ill, "obligé d'implorer la grande Nuit,"<sup>10</sup> as he wrote to his Buddhist friend Cazalis, but in possession of the essential images of his essential poetry: the closed room, the closed book, the empty fireplace under the marble mantel and mirror, the white paper, the dark window, the constellation beyond. Of the experience at Tournon, Mallarmé said that the old poet died and a new, "impersonal"<sup>11</sup> one was born. Of it he said "Ma pensée s'est pensée"<sup>12</sup>—by which he can only have meant a mystical reduction of duality of the kind that Friedrich Schelling was the first, in nineteenth-century Europe, to take from religion and apply to art—an

7. *Propos sur la poésie*, p. 75.

8. *Propos*, p. 75.

9. *Œuvres*, p. 872.

10. *Propos*, p. 87.

11. "C'est t'apprendre que je suis maintenant impersonnel, et non plus Stéphane que tu as connu,—mais une aptitude qu'a l'Univers Spirituel à se voir et à se développer, à travers ce qui fut moi."—*Propos*, p. 78.

12. *Propos*, p. 77.

instant during which thought had no object but itself, during which the distinction between subject and object, even between the ego and the *moi*, was lost. Out of it came not only the characteristic images but also the poet's confidence that from this time forward the framework was secure, that each poetic *donnée* would take, eventually, its place in the pattern, that twenty years might be necessary for finishing the *Grand Œuvre* now revealed to him but that, *œuvre de sa patience* thenceforward, it would be finished.

Out of that preparation, illumination and many winters' work came *Hérodiade*—the *Scène* from *Hérodiade*, that is—a poem about poetry. "J'ai enfin commencé mon *Hérodiade*. Avec terreur, car j'invente une langue qui doit nécessairement jaillir d'une poétique très nouvelle . . ." And then come the well-known *deux mots* stating the essential of that poetics: "Peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit."<sup>13</sup> The *Ouverture ancienne* of *Hérodiade* is not about poetry, but then the author did not intend the *Ouverture* in its existing form for publication, and to publish it at all, at least as the first of a three-part arrangement continued by the *Scène* and the *Cantique de Saint-Jean*—as has been done in fairly recent years—seems to fly against one of the most arresting of all the principles generated at Tournon, the paradoxically pregnant maxim formulated in a letter to Cazalis: "Il faut toujours couper le commencement et la fin de ce qu'on écrit. Pas d'introduction, pas de finale."<sup>14</sup> Nothing is more typical of Mallarmé than this assault on the Aristotelian prime foundations, from the most finished of the truncated sonnets to the least realizable of his dramatic projects, the Idea of a Theater represented by *Igitur*, where the drama lies at a hypothetical point of contact between the Theater shrunk to its Idea and the Hero reduced to the Hymn he sings—two expanding and diminishing principles which suggest the gyres of William Butler Yeats. The *Ouverture ancienne* represents a stage of its author's musical aspirations, and no doubt would have been, at a further stage, even more purely musical than it is. It has one of the most beautiful of all poetic realizations of mystery considered indispensable:

Ombre Magicienne aux symboliques charmes

("Magicienne" is capitalized.) But it also had much Romantic décor, lonely sacrificial tower and autumn landscape, and close-to-the-surface reminiscences of *Hamlet* and *Salammbô*. The *Scène*, on the other hand, endlessly reworked, cut loose from preamble, conclusion and *parti pris*, stands primarily for Mallarmé's poetic principles in their early severity. (This is not to say that *Hérodiade* is not also a *sauvage princesse*, awaiting, dreading another kind of experience.) Her most immediate literary forbear and closest counterpart is *Salammbô*, princess and priestess of Tanith, guardian of a sacred emblem. Before the characteristically foreshortened *Scène* be-

13. *Propos*, p. 43.

14. *Propos*, p. 39.

gins, she has undergone a trial, descended into the prison "Où de mes vieux lions traînent les siècles fauves." We must accept highly colored imagery, but so must we in the "Idumaeon night" of "Don du poème." Hérodiade's descent is akin to all the legendary Orphic testings, including those of Igitur and Mallarmé himself. During the *Scène*, the trying continues in the form of three tentative invasions of Hérodiade's solitude by the worldly nurse—essentially, so many temptations set before one who desires that poems, metaphorically speaking, "observent la froideur stérile du métal." This is the poem which the author sought most earnestly to make, and which does most vividly resemble, "un joyau significatif à manier sous le regard et faisant poids dans la main."<sup>15</sup> If its metaphors of jewels and metals do prolong, as has been said, a current of dehumanization set in motion by Baudelaire, we must understand that the end of this process is a fuller humanity, as sensations enter in just the proportion that the language is lightened. At the end of the poem, Hérodiade seems to be assuming a mediating, even controlling position between exasperated purity and the flood of experience.

As poetry is rid of what is extraneous to it, and we are thus enabled to *sense* the poems more keenly, there is further working out of the poetics of indirection. "By allusive words, never by direct ones . . ."<sup>16</sup> said Mallarmé, endeavoring to set down the central principle of his art for the London *National Observer*. And his poems illustrate more perfectly than any others the Symbolist procedure by which a subject, sometimes a landscape, more often an interior or still life, is isolated, circumscribed, drained of contours which the reader must bring clear again. The "things," to keep the Mallarmean word, the best one—the *choses abolies* little by little are, for example, the stained-glass window with a Saint Cecilia from which the poet takes away the accidental properties to give us the poetic substance of "Sainte"; or the sunset very much present, not in the least absent, in the early version of "Victorieusement fui le suicide beau" published in *Empreintes* in 1948. Emptied of the merely circumstantial, the "absence," to use the most characteristic word of the poems, or the Idea, to use the one commonest in the prose, the "absence" or "manque" or "creux" takes its place in the poem. There is nothing formidable about this Idea. Basically it is such as any late nineteenth-century aesthetic mind drew from the contemplation of objects. In the current of thought running directly counter to Hegel's, it corresponds to the first degree of objectification of the life force on the way to phenomena, the archetypal Ideas by which the contemplative idealist rescued art from the flux of phenomena. This Idea is "écrite au sein de la beauté,"<sup>17</sup> is a fragment of revealed truth. The word "written" is important because it reminds us once more of the most influential of all nineteenth-century poet-philosophers so far as literature is

15. *Propos*, p. 128.

16. "Magie," *National Observer*, 28 January 1893; and *Œuvres*, p. 400.

17. "... de merveilleuses dentelles, que je devine, et qui existent déjà dans le sein de la Beauté."—*Propos*, p. 71.

concerned, Schelling, for whom also beauty was a "hieroglyph," something to be deciphered. Schelling was one of those philosophers with whom Camille Mauclair thought that Mallarmé had a nodding acquaintance, and even if he did not he could have been exposed to the philosopher's doctrine in any number of derivative works. As Mallarmé worked out his poetics and the ideas behind it, he came more and more to conceive "mystery" as Schelling conceives it—not as something arbitrary, an impressive patch of shadow before the shrine, but as that part of the hieroglyphics which is not yet deciphered. Of course, there is the non-poetic interpretation of this poetics of revealed Ideas standing partly in their own sufficient light, partly in their inevitable shadow. Whenever we seek to withdraw these Ideas from the construct of the poem—which begs the question of the poetry, yet has been done by well-known critics—take them to be emblematic of a point of view rather than parts of a poem, it appears that Mallarmé's preference goes to Ideas divorced from phenomena, that he was to a heretical degree a spiritualist pretending to free us from space and time. And just as Descartes was attacked in his day as a sort of magician, a disembodier and displacer of souls, so Mallarmé—who reflected much on Descartes' idealism—has been reproached for magical pretensions.

Under the pressures to which language is subjected, what might be called the leverage of the subject disappears almost entirely. The subjects of the earlier poems had been "interesting" in themselves—malady of spring, sadness of summer, etc.—had showed an "interesting sensibility" at work. The *Faune* was to have been a play and even *Hérodias* fits into no mean series of plays, tales and pictures. But the most typical poems either take as their pretexts subjects chosen for their apparent insignificance—the *Eventail* poems—or else obliterate their subjects in such a way that they become endlessly debatable. If we take as examples of the latter the series of three sonnets, "Tout orgueil fume-t-il du soir," "Surgi de la croupe et du bond" and "Une dentelle s'abolit," the subject of the first is, to my mind, the cold ebbing of forces after the poetic-intellectual effort subsides, and its most immediate symbols are the flat marble surface and the chill room. The subject of the second sonnet, where the emptiness of a vase or vase-like chandelier is in point, is in my opinion the quite Baudelairian one of the inaccessibility of one ideal to two lovers. And the "Jeu suprême" of the third can only be poetry, the images of birth being all there, as they are in "Don du poème"; the Supreme Game was only one thing to Mallarmé, as to much smaller poets, for that matter, whatever it may have been to Molly Bloom. But there are other defensible readings of these poems, and that is as Mallarmé meant it to be. Like the magic skin of Balzac's visionary novel, the subject, which is life itself, has decreased so that the most abundant poetic wishes might come true.

The *Overture ancienne* of *Hérodias* had been a preamble to, an early guarantee of, the poet's concern with the music of verse. The phrase must



be kept intact, and Valéry's famous summing up of Symbolists' aims—they sought "to take back from music their own"—is unfortunate insofar as it has set far too many people thinking of a sort of tug-of-war over much that could ever conceivably have been shared. Mallarmé's respect for music is not to be questioned. We have the very title of his lecture at Oxford and Cambridge, "*La Musique et les lettres*," and the burden of that lecture: that music and poetry are the Janus-face of the same Idea, both giving access thereto. It is not too much to say that Mallarmé envied music the mysteriousness of its effects and the hermetic look of its scores; or that he felt impelled to discover, on the terms and conditions of language, its farthest melodic possibilities. But the two arts remain distinct in this mind so conscious of distinctions. There is never the slightest feeling, as in the case of Pound, for example, that the poem is somehow incomplete without the musical setting, that poetry must in some manner find its way back toward music—or to some amalgam of all the arts. Mallarmé shocked Dujardin by his indifference to Wagner as much as Yeats scandalized George Moore by a similar reaction; and out of "Richard Wagner, rêverie d'un poète français" there come only the nuance of alarm at Wagner's drift toward literature, a confession that Mallarmé found in Wagner's music only "a repose" ("un repos"), and a very clear statement of wherein what he [Mallarmé] was doing differed, in its bare definiteness, from Wagnerian myth-making. When Mallarmé finds his high praise for Verlaine, saying that he was the first "*qui leva l'archet*,"<sup>18</sup> when he says that "*la Musique, à sa date, est venue balayer cela*"<sup>19</sup>—meaning by "cela" offensive clarity in literature; even when musical instruments appear at those points in the poems where a poem is born—these are all delicate or profound metaphorical tributes.

In what does the music of Mallarmé's poetry consist (we know that the term remains a bit metaphorical)? What had the young poet envied in music and what did the older one have less reason to envy? All the qualities we have mentioned and another, much harder to formulate, having to do with the difference between a sonnet by Heredia, however good, and one by Mallarmé, having to do also with the fundamental difference between the plastic and the musical arts. We must work toward recognition of the fact that Mallarmé, like any important literary artist, was concerned with making words weightless and swift, with their dynamic possibilities. It will take some work because both Thibaudet and Madame Noulet, the best students of Mallarmé's language as such, seem to stand in the way at this point. Madame Noulet, at the end of those exegeses which it would be vain to praise, usually comes back to her view that Mallarmé is presenting rather faithfully a set of objects in space. Her remarks tend to restore a picture. For Thibaudet the poems are stases cast up by a retarding, finally

18. *Œuvres*, p. 512.

19. "*Le Mystère dans les lettres*," *Œuvres*, p. 384.

immobilizing syntax. And Thibaudet is the great student of that most typical syntactical pattern which Mallarmé described as follows: "commencer d'un éclat triomphal trop brusque pour durer; invitant que se groupe, en retards, libérés par l'écho, la surprise."<sup>20</sup> That syntax has several substantival rather than predicative characteristics. The "éclat triomphal" very often consists of two rhetorically embellished substantives. Of twenty-three sonnets from "Billet à Whistler" on, ten have as their first verb-form a past participle, so that the verbal action is caught very close to the point where it would cease to be action. It is typical of Mallarmé, who does all that he does with minimum means, that this should be the case. But it is very important to notice that what might have been a static interior scene is not static:

Surgi de la croupe et du bond  
D'une verrerie éphémère . . .

The effect is obtained by a past participle not quite adjectival and by two nouns compact with movement.

It is something of a shock to pass from the essentially Mallarméan world of the later sonnets to the less essential, though indispensable, one of "Toast funèbre." This poem is part programme. It tells us a great deal about the literary origins of Mallarmé and the Symbolists, what he and they thought about the mortality of the soul except insofar as there can be an immortality of art, "la gloire ardente du métier," all this in language of great vibrancy. In nearly direct application of the idea expressed in the preface to René Ghil's *Traité du Verbe* it presents the Master as the one who calls the Lily and the Rose and all other objects into veritable existence by giving them a name—this in lines of luminous beauty. This is an extreme point to which a poetry dedicated to the evocation of absences leads. The Master who controls those absences has magical powers; and we are carried back from historical Symbolism to certain uncertain beginnings of the race when he who named controlled. "Toast funèbre" reveals much about historical Symbolism, something about the origins of poetry. Why is it that this outright usurpation of divine powers is a little disturbing, not quite centered, not quite authentic so far as Mallarmé himself is concerned? Perhaps it is because Mallarmé simply did not believe in being outright, because he took very seriously Poe's stricture on didactic heresy, and when he sets out formally to replace one didacticism with another, orthodox religion with a religion of poetry, he forces and distorts ever so slightly.

Little has been said up till now about an important direction of Mallarmé's poetic described in his own words as *le hasard vaincu mot par mot*. This is because the poet has much to say in later works about chance not conquered, and despite some shift in meaning between *le hasard* of letters and articles and the hazard-probability of *Un Coup de dés* the earlier doc-

20. "Le Mystère dans les lettres," *Œuvres*, p. 384.



trine and the later poetic fact belong together. Let us accept as true, first of all, that none of Mallarmé's guiding principles was more genuinely productive than his desire to turn all of them toward the banishment of chance, the adventitious, from poetic composition. That aim does much to explain the concentration of his poetry, the weight of his example. At least as early as 1869, however, the date of the conception of *Igitur*, he was aware of the profoundly *as if* nature of the conception of the pure poem, or of any conception. Well before *Un Coup de dés* he conceived poetic process as "conjunction with probability," knew that the most vigorous and controlled intellectual effort ultimately meets up with the uncontrollable, and cannot, therefore, bring forth the pure work, *l'unique Nombre*. There are even passages which sound remarkably like concessions to the Romantic doctrine of enthusiasm. I am thinking, among others, of the line introducing the wonderfully beautiful evocation of antiquity in "Mes bouquins refermés sur le nom de Paphos":

Il m'amuse d'élire avec le seul génie . . .

"Génie" has been read as having the meaning of "ingenium," something close to "fancy." But the lending of etymological meanings to words is by no means as frequent or systematic in Mallarmé as it is with, let us say, Valéry or St.-J. Perse. Why should "génie" not be read as meaning what it ordinarily does in the nineteenth century—as a power that possessed (when it did not mean the individual thus possessed)? There would be no reflection on Mallarmé's modesty, since he always aspired to maximum control. The meaning of "éperdument," in any case, further on in the poem, is unambiguous:

Je pense plus longtemps peut-être éperdument  
A l'autre, au sein brûlé d'une antique amazone.

The poet represents himself as gazing, lost to himself, at the most vivid of all images of the pure, the controlled poem. But this is not to say that the doctrine of the pure poem, the *as if* of *le hasard vaincu*, meant less to him. This was a time when cracks were appearing in several firmaments, and the best defender of any *as if* was the man most aware of it.

In its essential outline, *Un Coup de dés* is the climactic example of the *action évitée* in Mallarmé. We think of the swan that does not rise in "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui," except that the poet's imagination makes us see it rise, the imaginary voyage to the island of "Prose pour des Esseintes," the island that never was except as a hypothesis of the poet plainly stated in the poem. And one of the first characteristics to notice in this work which tends to present much simultaneously, is that the central adventure, in concrete terms a voyage by sea leading to a shipwreck, is another pure hypothesis, and the throw of the dice to which it would

theoretically lead never takes place—except that the most fundamental impression of all is the rendering of the wave-motion by the words and second most fundamental is that of dice forming a Dipper-like constellation at the end. This is, in other words, another vindication of the reality of the Idea, the powers of the imagination, a fragment of a supreme fiction. Action is also an absence, and *Un Coup de dés*, in this sense, only deepens and continues the course of Mallarmé's poetry. In this poem his most characteristic concerns are heightened, focussed. The lines on the page, always considered in relation to the intervening spaces and margins, now take the definitive form of the ideograph: first the dominant line which, as in certain Japanese paintings, runs from panel to panel or page to page, always down a given page to start again at the top of the next one, and then the lesser ideographs, the whirlpool, the feathered cap of Hamlet, who always remained the most idealistic of heroes for Mallarmé, even a nymph. Meanwhile *le blanc*, the white of the paper, contains what the poet calls the "intellectual armature" of the poem. These directions of Mallarmé's poetic effort were of long standing; and the sea voyage as a prime symbol of the human experience was certainly not new either in Mallarmé's poetry (where we have, notably, the sonnet "A la nue accablante tu"), in the poetry of the nineteenth century, or of other centuries. It is by the special forms of its directness, and in particular by the attention given the temporal dimension of a poem-thought, its demonstration by the downward and then resurgent movement of the dominant line on the pages, the flow and ebb of the whole mind-made form, that *Un Coup de dés* adds to our understanding of Mallarmé's poetics and the possibilities of poetry. Such treatment of temporal form was unprecedented, and has set no precedent, so closely is it bound to its subject, the rising-falling, lunging-recoiling struggle of the ego toward consciousness as Mallarmé, together with others of his century, conceived it. At many important points *Un Coup de dés*, which first appeared three years before the close of the century, reminds us of a book which serves to mark the beginning of the century, Schelling's *Transcendental Idealism*. Deep in the form and substance of *Un Coup de dés*, and in other, earlier poems, as we have seen, is Schelling's conception of the imagination's power to reduce duality, impose unity—the "esemplastic action" as Coleridge understood it. The moment of crisis, of the throw of the dice, in *Igitur*, that prose anticipation of *Un Coup de dés*, and of the hypothetical throw of the dice in the poem, is the moment when the protagonist is his conscience, when the human contradiction is solved, when "his thought thinks itself," to use the words of Mallarmé at Tournon. At the apex of the spiritual order, for Schelling, stood the poet with his capacity truly to create, and also, with his capacity for sympathy, to find his way down the scale of spiritual powers existing throughout the universe toward those lowlier orders where spirit, imprisoned by matter, also strives. Such universal striving of spirit limited by matter it was Mallarmé's painful joy to repre-

sent always, and in one poem to seize, with such uncommon immediacy, at the very heart of the motion. Yet, when such far-reaching things have been said, we must make some small effort of the imagination ourselves if we would begin to understand what it must have meant to Mallarmé, who had obeyed the most tyrannical rules of French versification, who never, otherwise, even wrote any *vers libres*, and who announced as his most sensational news to his English lecture audience "On a touché au vers!" to compose this wavering graph-line of a poem, the only finished fragment of his *Grand Œuvre*, the work which he felt had been entrusted to him at Tournon.

The poetics of Mallarmé presents a few variables among many constants. We will continue to think of him, and rightly, as the poet of the crystal-like Idea, the obsessive Absence. And yet, being what he was, a poet of an epoch particularly sensitive to all the modes of becoming, even his tenaciously maintained principles fluctuate, from the early plasticity to the evocation of absence to the hints of more urgent presence. In particular, there were appreciable variations in his attitude toward *le hasard*. It seems now a curiously mistaken reading of *Un Coup de dés*, indicating a strange desire to make Mallarmé a disappointed pilgrim of the aesthetic absolute, to have found that work to be a *fier échec*. No etymological explanation of "hasard" should have been needed, though one is available, to make the reader understand that "hasard" and a throw of the dice are close allied, that the poet was saying, in the boldest printed line of all running through the poem, something very close to "A throw of the dice will never abolish a throw of the dice," a pleonasm immediately suggestive of some other modern styles. When Mallarmé says at the end, summing up, "Toute pensée émet un Coup de Dés," he is affirming that thought is subject to chance, but not deploring it. In the later poems there are clear signs that the poet had pursued the principle of *le hasard vaincu* to a point where it was exhausted and all but reversed, becoming something like *le hasard accepté*—probability and all the hazardous enterprises of the imagination. Another way of approaching this shift might be to say that in reading the later poems one thinks less often of Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* and more often of Poe's *Poetic Principle*. But this is also an approximation, and we are far from suggesting that Mallarmé, like the important poets formed by the principles he inspired, ceased to be in a very meaningful sense a Symbolist. This is only to suggest that at the heart of the Symbolist doctrines there was pursued such a questioning, such a testing, that we should avoid all easy assumptions as to what those doctrines actually were.

## RIMBAUD'S POETICS: HALLUCINATION AND EPIPHANY

By W. M. Frohock

RIMBAUD now interests us more than any other French poet of his time except possibly Mallarmé. What seems to us the main line by which most recent French poetry joins the tradition runs through him. His poems are obscure and cry out for interpretation even as they defy it—and ours is a generation of interpreters. His mysterious figure, and the curious trajectory of his career, seem uncannily emblematic. Some of us see him as the explorer who returned to the womb and published its arcane geography; to others he is a Lazarus who saw beyond the tomb of poetry.

The intensity of our interest, the multitudinous possible meanings of his poems, and the consistent inconclusiveness of all the peripheral documents, combine to make interpretation particularly hazardous. Our explications pelt headlong down closed, private avenues, and up blind alleys. Miraculously, even our most horrendous mistakes do not seem particularly to spoil the poetry for us. The significance of Etiemble's recent and delightful compendium of errors committed by Rimbaud's critics will occupy us later; for now it is enough that Etiemble has identified, in printed works, 16,000 different ways to be wrong—in which people *have* been wrong—about Rimbaud.

Yet, even though critical error appears incapable of discouraging Rimbaud's readers, we are really under no obligation to add to Etiemble's collection. We need not make a perilous enterprise more dangerous than inherently it is. In particular, we should avoid being influenced in our reading of the poems by a poetics which we assume was Rimbaud's but perhaps was not, or which we take with a resolutely systematic seriousness such as Rimbaud himself may not have been able to muster. This is saying that we should be enlightened by what we know to be our ignorance at least as much as by what we presume to be our knowledge. For we know very little indeed about Rimbaud's poetics, and far less than at times we have thought we knew.

The key document, the famous letter that Rimbaud wrote from Charleville on May 15, 1871—at the age of sixteen years and seven months—to his friend Paul Demeny, enlarges on one written perhaps two days previously to his older friend and ex-teacher, Georges Izambard. Rimbaud had been kept at home all winter, unhappy, broke and bored, with nothing to do but think. He had doubtless been thinking about poetry, although from the way the ideas develop from the first letter to the second one could argue that he had probably not entertained them very long. Both letters contain the monumentally familiar phrase, about the *dérèglement de tous les*

sens, that everyone quotes. It is a pity that the entire letters are less familiar, especially the second, the *lettre du voyant*. It merits the most attentive reading, with particular respect to the passages that follow.

Car JE est un autre. Si le cuivre s'éveille clairon, il n'y a rien de sa faute. Cela m'est évident: j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée: je la regarde, je l'écoute: je lance un coup d'archet: la symphonie fait son remuement dans les profondeurs, ou vient d'un bond sur la scène. . . .

Je dis qu'il faut être *voyant*, se faire *voyant*.

Le Poète se fait *voyant* par un long, immense et raisonné *dérèglement de tous les sens*. Toutes les formes d'amour, de souffrance, de folie; il cherche lui-même, il épuise en lui tous les poisons, pour n'en garder que les quintessences. Ineffable torture où il a besoin de toute la foi, de toute la force surhumaine, où il devient entre tous le grand malade, le grand criminel, le grand maudit—et le suprême Savant!—Car il arrive à l'*inconnu*! Puisqu'il a cultivé son âme, déjà riche, plus qu'aucun! Il arrive à l'inconnu, et quand, affolé, il finirait par perdre l'intelligence de ses visions, il les a vues! Qu'il crève dans son bondissement par les choses inouïes et innommables: viendront d'autres horribles travailleurs; ils commenceront par les horizons où l'autre s'est affaissé!

In view of my remark about the pity of not knowing the letters in their entirety it would be most inappropriate to lift these passages out of context, especially since doing so would almost certainly lead us to a false reading of them. A false reading, here, would be a too literal one. The tone of the *lettre du voyant*, or rather its lack of a uniform tone, is a warning against literal reading. For Rimbaud is in places ironical, in others arrogant, elsewhere self-deprecating, now deadly serious and again playful. He starts by promising Demyen "an hour of new literature," announces that it will begin with a "psalm of the present," and proceeds to copy down his own satirical "Chant de guerre parisien." Next he devotes one paragraph to the history of poetry, disposing pretty thoroughly of the subject. "No joking, no paradoxes," he adds. "Reason inspires me with more certainties than a Jeune-France had hatreds. Besides, the *new* are free to execrate their ancestors; we are on our own ground, and we have the time." Now he drops irony and self-criticism. The Romantics have never properly been understood. Who would have done it? The critics? The Romantics themselves who prove that a song is so infrequently a work, i.e. a thought sung and understood by the singer?" (My italics.) And this takes him to the paragraph beginning "JE est un autre." And there is no denying that from this point to the end of the paragraph he sounds, to put it mildly, intense. But, looking back, he also sounds a bit bombastic: the repetitions of *tous* and *toutes*, words like *criminel*, *maudit*, *crève*, *bondissement*, *inouïes*, *innommables*, *horribles travailleurs*, etc., add to the picture of the poet-Pandora. And Rimbaud, looking back, knows it: after the word *affaissé* comes a break, and then he writes: "To be continued in six minutes." When he resumes he copies into the letter another of his own poems.



Certainly we should be wrong to deny that Rimbaud was seriously concerned with what he was saying. But we should be just as wrong to insist on being more uniformly serious than the poet himself was. We shall have to pick up the matter of tone again shortly.

There are four pivotal issues in the letter. First, Rimbaud has discovered an interesting quirk in his own personality: the whole of him is not actively involved in the poetic process. Second, he has decided that the poet's function is to pioneer the unknown: the poet is to be a seer and perceiver of things hitherto unperceived. Third, he declares that the fundamental split in the poet's ego makes it possible to become a seer through the systematic study and cultivation of his own personality. And, fourth, he must develop a language adequate for expressing his discoveries of the unknown.

What he may have meant by "JE est un autre" has been the subject of endless speculation. The phrase could not but excite the amateur psychologist. But we are not necessarily in the presence of incipient schizophrenia. Any number of imaginative men have discovered two principles in their egos, one active and one passive, one that participates and one that observes, one that departs on strange excursions into the wilds of the imagination and another that remains behind. Most of us are aware of a dissociation within ourselves of the part which presides over snaffle and bit and the part which is bloody 'orse. The conviction that the moral personality is organized thus is ancient; belief in the importance of the far-ranging part in aesthetic creation has long been common. Rimbaud's variation on the theme is his contention that the observing part, instead of playing a disciplinary role, can be set to directing the other increasingly further afield. In other respects, nothing in the letter justifies the belief that Rimbaud has discovered anything about the ego that Pascal, and the Musset Rimbaud so thoroughly detested, had not discovered before him. He may have thought he had—it takes more than genius to make a lad of seventeen realise that most of his experience merely recapitulates the experience of the race—but even this is conjecture, for he puts his emphasis, from the start, not upon the split in the personality but upon the use it can be put to. To have such an ego is in itself a destiny. So much the worse, he says in each of the letters, for the man who finds himself so constructed: so much the worse for the wood that finds it has become a violin or for the metal that finds itself a trumpet.

The nature of the poet's training is clear. He will encourage the perception of the unknown through a systematic disordering of the senses. This invasion of the unknown, of course, consists of stimulating hallucinations. The poet will wittingly turn himself into a hallucinated individual. The unknown that he talks about is the newly encountered hallucination.

All this doctrine follows hard upon the traces of Baudelaire. The latter had seen the poet's special understanding of the universe to be an understanding of relationships, set forth in metaphor: the universe, he felt, was



a vast reservoir of metaphor, and metaphor was knowledge. Rimbaud merely pushes Baudelaire's belief a bit further, for hallucination is, after all, the ultimate limit of metaphor. The hallucinated individual sees visions that the rest of mankind do not; but these things are compositions and the components themselves can hardly be new in human experience. With the help of a bit of stimulant, perhaps, one could see a dog whose forelegs were replaced by lobster claws, and be right in feeling that this monster was something unknown. But there is nothing new or unknown about dogs or lobster claws. What is new is the experience of a relationship: the hallucination has dislocated two elements of our familiar world and put them together again in a thoroughly unfamiliar association. Hallucination is metaphor taken without the requisite salt—as if one bleated instead of saying, "The Lord is my shepherd."

At the time of the *lettre du voyant* Rimbaud is able to say very little about the process of producing hallucination. The poet must render his own soul monstrous, like a man planting and cultivating warts on his own face. He must be superlatively sick, criminal, and accursed. (The vocabulary of Rimbaud's poetry may be scrupulously un-Romantic, but a good Romantic wind sometimes inflates his prose.) He speaks of going on the bum ("Je m'encrapule le plus possible") and says he is sponging as much as possible, and as often—but this merely makes him a bar-fly. Perhaps he is also having an initial experience with women, although when he speaks of *bocks et filles* we can not be sure that *filles* is not *ardennais* for wine-bottle. Later he will add to the list the abuse of coffee, tea, and tobacco, and the practice of staying up too late, but even in Paris the avenues of "dérèglement" are limited for those who have no money. It is doubtful whether his homosexuality, especially his homosexual affair with Verlaine, should be counted. And only the very Freudian indeed will classify his experience of homosexual rape—if in fact he did experience one—among the sought-for stimulants; the rest of us will believe it unlikely that Rimbaud tried to make himself the victim of violence. In any case and in whatever light one sees these last two items, they came well after the writing of the *lettre du voyant*.

Perhaps one day we shall find the long lost *Chasse spirituelle* which is supposed to contain more information than we now have about Rimbaud's hallucination-making. But the *Chasse*—if indeed it exists and is not merely Verlaine's drunken inventing—will be something new and wonderful in Rimbaldiana if it answers more questions than it raises. And unless it manages to be specific we shall remain unenlightened. Meanwhile we have to be content with the knowledge that Rimbaud, still following and improving upon Baudelaire, turned to various forms of stimulation and found them unpleasant. For the present, nothing authorises us to overlook the impressive discrepancy between the horrendous qualities the poet must attain (*grand malade, grand criminel, grand maudit* and *suprême Savant*) and the banality of the means at hand for attaining them. The suffering, so he

tells us, is extreme. Precisely! At this one point Rimbaud is neither bombastic nor vague. He is saying that in order to attain to poetry the poet must undergo an ordeal. That, and very little more.

The biographers who take Rimbaud's ordeal at face value are perhaps the dupes of a not-uncommon ritualism. Rimbaud's formula conforms suspiciously well to a quite familiar ritual pattern. A being of unusual sensitivity and intensity feels himself by nature and internal organization different from the tribe. He is forced, more or less against his will, to withdraw from the group. During this separation—in Rimbaud's case the winter spent in unwilling reclusion in Charleville—he undergoes a painful experience, but eventually emerges from it in possession of new knowledge, of a kind inaccessible to those who have not known the pain. Henceforth he becomes, both in his own eyes and those of his tribe, a very specially endowed creature. Roughly this is the pattern of the ritual experience of the Shaman, and the program Rimbaud proposes is so like it that we are forced to stop and wonder. Rimbaud may never have heard the word Shaman or known anything about Siberian native lore; he may not have suspected that his program followed a pattern at all. But the Shaman ritual is too widespread, in too many cultures, as the qualifying experience of the seer or *voyant*, for us to be absolutely sure that the ordeal was real at all. Surely it did not have to be real to be useful to the poet; he had merely to believe in its power. Until we know a lot more than we do now we had better not interpret either his poetics or his poetry as involving a literal biographical experience of pain or relief from pain.

All that our present knowledge permits us to say is that the ordeal itself is less impressive than the use Rimbaud expects to make of it. The importance of his whole program, it seems to me, lies in his regarding the ordeal—whatever the status of the ordeal may be—as a qualifying experience, an initiation. This specifies the definitive rupture with French Romantic poetics, and perhaps with all Romanticism. We have at last abandoned the Pageant-of-the-Bleeding-Heart gambit which had been the controlling one from Lamartine to Baudelaire. The poet is no longer a pelican feeding its young on its own vitals. His suffering is not a subject to orchestrate, as it was for Hugo and Musset; or for him to refuse, with great eloquence, to discuss, as it was for Vigny and Leconte de Lisle. Instead, it is an instrument which the poet uses self-consciously; the initiation will not be a gift from the Gods; he will contrive and seek out his suffering. (There is, of course, a marked streak of masochism in Rimbaud.) And the immortal songs that come as the reward of the ordeal will be the opposite of Musset's "pure sobs." Rimbaud speaks somewhere of "hallucinations of the word" to accompany the other kind.

So much can be said about the poetics of the *lettre du voyant* without doing violence to the text. I doubt that we could say very much more. But what about the end result of Rimbaud's poetic program?

Up to now I have called his aim the stimulating of hallucination, and equated hallucination with a kind of metaphor. But in the *lettre du voyant* Rimbaud does not use the word hallucination—nothing so specific as that! He talks about a kind of knowledge or insight attained by the systematic confusion of the senses. Only later, when he is looking back over a good part of his poetic career (the actual date is very much in dispute) and is disillusioned by what he sees, does the word hallucination itself appear, and then in a tone of disparagement.

Yet hallucination is certainly what the *lettre du voyant* is talking about, and this raises a considerable problem about Rimbaud's poetic practice. For it requires more than a little effort to detect many traces of real hallucination in Rimbaud's work. Much has been made of the poem called "Les Poètes de sept ans" with its picture of the little boy pressing a finger against his eyeball to produce a doubled image, but what child does not know that secret? "Bateau ivre," which the anthologies generally present as an example of Rimbaud's putting his *voyant* theories into practice, is an immensely bookish and self-conscious work: the strange dislocations and reassociations of the exterior world from which it is built are created out of things the poet has read. This much the influence hunters have convinced us of. And as a matter of fact, all the unremitting search for the sources of imagery in the other poems eventuates in an admission, on the part of a number of very assiduous readers, that they feel that the key to Rimbaud's poetry is the destruction of the strangeness, the rendering plausible of what seems not to be, the demonstration that what seems wildly spontaneous is really self-conscious and controlled.

Few poets, actually, seem to have been less hallucinated than Rimbaud. He sounds, in the poems, like the possessor of an almost puritanically pure eye:

Et tout ce corps remue et tend sa large croupe  
Belle hideusement d'un ulcère à l'anus.

The poems written, so far as we know, at the time of the *lettre du voyant*, are about how he feels physically, and what he likes and dislikes. They have a somewhat juvenile pruriency. They can be remarkably savage. Their vocabulary is at times almost scientifically accurate and at other times betrays a love for the kind of words one can play with:

Ithyphalliques et pioupiesques  
Leurs quolibets l'ont dépravé!  
Au gouvernail on voit des fresques  
Ithyphalliques et pioupiesques.  
O flots abracadabrantésques,  
Prenez mon cœur, qu'il soit lavé!  
Ithyphalliques et pioupiesques,  
Leurs quolibets l'ont dépravé.

At moments he has the precision of Toulouse-Lautrec:

Doux comme le Seigneur du cèdre et des hysopes,  
Je pisse vers les cieux bruns, très haut et très loin,  
Avec l'assentiment des grands héliotropes.

Even in the later poetry, including the *Illuminations*, the reader who does not come to his task with "ideas to verify" will find a great deal that suggests not hallucination so much as mere intuitive perception of the Way Things Are.

I was asked in this room a year ago whether I would not consent to consider certain of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* to be "concatenations of Epiphanies." I had to say No: if there are illuminating visions or privileged moments or instances of unusually profound or intense perception—which I doubt—they are not concatenated, for concatenation is structurally alien to the *Cantos*. But I now find the notion of the Epiphany most useful in understanding Rimbaud's poetics. For the poetic act implied in the *lettre du voyant* (i.e. the perception of the Unknown by a privileged person) and the intuitive perception of the Way Things Are as found in the poetry, are what we mean by Epiphanies. The great usefulness of his ordeal to the poet, whether the ordeal is literal or the formalization of a ritual, is that it makes the Epiphany possible.

May we now extend the equation previously proposed, to read metaphor-equals-hallucination-equals-knowledge-equals-Epiphany? No, even though Rimbaud uses the word hallucination and probably thought of the essential poetic experience as hallucination—at least when he tried to put one word to it at all. For the word means something different to us from what it meant in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. It was then extremely popular in explanations of the life of the mind, and was used in extensions of meaning which we do not recognize. Only a few years before the *lettre du voyant*, Hippolyte Taine had even defined the exterior world, in its relation to the individual, as "une hallucination vraie," a hallucination that happens to be true among a number that are not. Psychology has covered much ground since then, at least in the development of a vocabulary, and has abandoned the word, in its extended meaning at least, for more precise ones. In view of these circumstances, it would be appropriate not to add Epiphany to the equation, but rather to substitute it for hallucination.

As a poetic program, the *lettre du voyant* is incomplete and fails to be specific where we most need specific information. Rimbaud's interpreters have until recently referred to certain fragments of Rimbaud's later writing to supplement and complete their knowledge. In particular they have depended heavily on passages from *Une Saison en enfer* like "L'Alchimie du verbe":

La vieillerie poétique avait une bonne part dans mon alchimie du verbe.

Je m'habituai à l'hallucination simple: je voyais très franchement une mosquée à la place d'une usine, une école de tambours faite par des anges, des calèches sur les routes du ciel, un salon au fond d'un lac; les monstres, les mystères; un titre de vaudeville dressait des épouvantes devant moi.

Puis j'expliquai mes sophismes magiques avec l'hallucination des mots!

Je finis par trouver sacré le désordre de mon esprit. J'étais oisif, en proie à une lourde fièvre: j'enviais la félicité des bêtes,—les chenilles, qui représentent l'innocence des limbes, les taupes, le sommeil de la virginité!

Mon caractère s'aigrissait. Je disais adieu au monde dans d'espèces de romances...

On the basis of such notes they were able to trace a neat and symmetrical parabola of Rimbaud's poetic career. He had begun writing poetry in the manner of the late Romantics and Parnassians, some of it already excellent stuff like:

Par les soirs bleus d'été, j'irai dans les sentiers  
Picoté par les blés, fouler l'herbe menue...

Next, during the moment of exile at home in Charleville, where his mother and the dullness of the town had collaborated to make him wretched, he had fallen upon the technique of dislocating elements of the ordinary visible world and reassociating the parts in what he felt was a new imagery. This was the vocation of the *voyant*.

Then he had tried out the technique in poems like "Bateau ivre" in which he took the world apart and put it together again. These are the poems which invariably appear in the anthologies.

Subsequently he pushed the technique toward its limits. His hallucinations became so powerful that he finally confused himself with God. But before he discovered that he had reached the limits he had written the *Illuminations*.

Finally he recognised the limits, and renounced poetry, writing the *Saison en enfer* as a farewell both to poetry and to a misspent youth. After that he wandered enigmatically across Europe and eventually off to Abyssinia. His interest in poetry, it appeared, had failed so completely that he even dropped the project of publishing the *Saison*, after a few advance copies had come off the press.

This chart of a career was neat, with everything in place. It had the disadvantage of being too neat to be true.

First, the story of Rimbaud's losing interest in the publication of the *Saison* turned out to be false. To the dismay of collectors who had paid high for the advance copies, the rest of the edition turned up intact in the store-rooms of the Belgian printer. Rimbaud, publishing at his own expense, had exhausted not his interest but his cash. The discovery did not



invalidate the neat account of Rimbaud's career, but it was at least an intimation of things to come.

Next appeared a book by a patient man named Bouillane de Lacoste. Bouillane has been accused of insensitiveness to poetry and even of actively disliking poetry, but no one denies that he has been an indefatigable and careful worker in a field where liking or disliking poetry makes very little difference. He collected all the dated examples of Rimbaud's handwriting and set up a chronology of the changes in the poet's script. With this he felt that he could redate the poems. Eventually he came to the conclusion that *Une Saison en enfer* was written before, not after, the *Illuminations*.

This claim was disconcerting to say the least. The *Saison* cannot be a plausible farewell to poesy if after it Rimbaud went on to the pinnacle of his achievement, the *Illuminations*. And—this could delight only those Philistines who chortle when a prize-winning abstraction turns out to be hung upside-down—what guarantees, in this situation, that the *Illuminations* are finished work? Isn't there a chance that they are just sketches, what a painter calls *croquis*, notes for work never written? After all, it would be these *Illuminations* and not the *Saison* that Rimbaud had not been interested in publishing. Of course, the old satyr Verlaine had in fact maundered something about the *Illuminations* being the later work. Now, suppose he was right! Bouillane's discovery was extremely inconvenient.

It has not been universally accepted. Some competent students suspect that Bouillane may now and then have lavished his endless patience on Rimbaud's copies of his own poems, for we know that there were instances when Rimbaud had made copies of poems long after the original redaction, and that he had the infuriating habit of dating the copy as though it were the original. In how many others, up to now undetected, has the same thing happened? Bouillane may have fallen frequently into error despite his monumental pains. Other scholars reject his datings on the grounds that if the *Saison* is not later than the *Illuminations* it is impossible to know what certain passages in the *Saison* mean. They too have a point: certain passages do resist re-explication. Yet one hesitates to reject the theory that the earth is round because it invalidates certain convenient data posited on the earth's flatness. It is not as if these were the only passages of Rimbaud that mocked our understanding.

What Bouillane has done is to put uncertainties where there were certainties before. And where once we felt justified in reading Rimbaud's poetry as the trying out and eventual failure of a poetics—which our neat but henceforth shaky little account of his career fully authorised—we must now be wary lest what we know, or think we know, about the poetics deflect us from the meaning of the poetry.

And so, in Rimbaud's centenary year and eighty years after he wrote his last poetry, we know a lot about the man, less about his poetry, and



less yet about the relation between his poetry and his poetics. On this last subject we are condemned to begin with fact, but to end with acts of faith. The *lettre du voyant* is a fact, but it is not explicit enough to illumine our problem, and besides, he wrote it at the wrong moment: the right moment would have been 1875. One might think that in these circumstances his interpreters would have been cautious—but only if one did not know interpreters and their capacity for faith where fact is lacking.

The multiple versions of some of the poems in turn multiply the textual problems. There are few dependable records. Much of the material went through the notoriously unsteady hands of Verlaine. Correspondence is frequently ambiguous, and reminiscences of friends and enemies alike are chaotic. Long and intricate interpretations have been founded, as Etiemble has shown, on the disputable reading of a phrase.

Some interpretations are nothing short of amazing. Jacques Gengoux proposes the thesis that from his earliest poems Rimbaud was so influenced by his readings of the Kabbala that the entire canon must be understood in the light of a special Kabbalist symbology. Rolland de Renéville argues, with no less conviction, that the key to the poems is Hindu philosophy. Miss Starkie says that the symbolism is apparent, even transparent if one knows that Rimbaud read Ballanche. And there are almost as many different explications of certain individual poems—for example "Voyelles"—as there are interpreters.

The situation would be difficult even if the interpreters were disinterested. They have frequently been the opposite. Rimbaud's fortune has been to be captured and annexed. Old Paterné Berrichon set the pattern in his biography by capturing Rimbaud for respectability and the Rimbaud family—and in the process was annexed himself when Isabelle Rimbaud married him, apparently, to make an honest man of her brother. Claudel continued the process by capturing the poet for the Catholic church, on the somewhat elusive argument that no one could have been the complete scum Rimbaud was without being a Catholic at heart. Later, André Breton captured him for the Surrealists, and Aragon annexed him to the Communists—both for reasons that surprise no one. In fact, it has long been impossible to surprise readers of Rimbaud criticism.

For the possibilities of starting an interpretation from some newly discovered source are infinite because the discoverable influences are infinite. Rimbaud was a well-read young man. Chateaubriand's American writings, *Twenty Thousand Leagues . . .*, the later Hugo, Baudelaire, current geographies, the Kabbala, children's picture books . . . everything. Because, of course, Rimbaud was very young and an artist learns, as Malraux has recently pointed out, not from life but from other artists. All that the influences prove, when they prove anything, is that what Rimbaud wrote is what the French call secondary literature, poetry made from other poetry.

The great value of Etiemble's *Mythe de Rimbaud* does not lie in his reve-

lation that everyone who has opened his mouth about Rimbaud has contrived to say something silly. The company, which includes not only Etiemble himself but also the jury of professors who judged the book when it was presented as a thesis at the Sorbonne, is distinguished enough for anyone with the least streak of nastiness in his nature to share Etiemble's unholy delight; one cannot read the book without falling into profitable meditation on the fallibility of critics and scholars alike. But even more to be cherished is Etiemble's demonstration of how small the acorns of fact may be from which the oaks of Rimbaud interpretation grow.

These systematic constructions are, of course, false only to the extent that each of them, by its nature, foists an implicit poetics upon Rimbaud. Tacitly they make his views of poetry and the poet conform to the special meanings they derive from the poems. They add, inevitably, to the sum of misinformation and misapprehension that has grown up around the poet.

In brief, the more we ponder the subject of Rimbaud's poetics, the more caution commends itself. If we are persuaded that his program aimed at inducing Epiphanies, that is probably enough. One of the reasons he interests us so much is very likely that in our post-Proustian and post-Joycean world we are peculiarly sensitive to the power of Epiphanies. Or, to put it differently, this precociously gifted though otherwise repulsive child was one of our direct ancestors.

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## THE POIETICS OF PAUL VALÉRY

By Jackson Mathews

### I. THE AESTHETIC THEORY<sup>1</sup>

THOSE who prefer to think of Paul Valéry as a poet or an aphoristic writer may be surprised at this attempt to formulate his aesthetic theory. Many feel that any systematic approach to his thought is worse than useless, that it actually does him wrong. It is true that the principal value of a poet's aesthetic is likely to be found in the insight into his own work or in the special view it affords of his way of working, the peculiar habit of his mind, or in the insights and judgments it may lead him to, along the way; and it is true that few of these things are likely to survive in a summary of the kind I am about to make.

Nevertheless, I wish presently to exhibit Paul Valéry as a somewhat systematic philosopher. Perhaps I should say a philosopher after the fact, for in speaking before the French Society of Philosophy in 1928, Valéry confessed that the preoccupation of his life since 1892, his principal work as he considered, had been "the passionate and stubborn study of a few questions which I afterwards realized were philosophical questions" . . . "And, I confess, I have even imagined that I might turn these obstinate divagations into one of those large green volumes whose format and appearance classify them at once as belonging on the shelf of philosophy."<sup>2</sup> Whenever Valéry spoke of his "work," you could be sure he meant these speculations, recorded in his Notebooks, and not his published literary works, which he thought of simply as by-products of his real business. The truth is, I think, that Valéry had in some sense or other a powerfully systematic mind. It was a mind in which system was *held as vision*, to be exploited by the imagination for literary purposes, but also to be explored in theoretical terms, as a philosophy aiming at a systematic view of the mind itself. The latter activity was in Valéry's own estimate the more important of the two.

Valéry lectured at the Collège de France for eight years, from 1937 straight through the war to 1945, within a few months of his death. Only one of these lectures was ever published, the first, the *Introduction to Poetics*.<sup>3</sup> During the first two years of this Course, Valéry's aim was to construct a theory of sensibility and a theory of the creative act which

1. This article, incomplete in itself, is part of a small volume now being written on Valéry's theory of the creative process.

2. "La Création artistique," *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie*, January 1928.

3. Notes taken by Georges Le Breton from the first 17 lectures were published in *Yggdrasil*, 1937-1938.

together would make a complete system of dynamics of the creative process. This system was to be founded on his immediate observation of everything that belonged to his own conscious life, the life of the mind, "la vie élaborante" as he called it. He thought it possible to formulate a table of relations comparable to the fundamental equations of mechanics, a table that would amount to a conception of the whole mechanism of the living man. Such a system would bring together, he said, all the essential conditions of our existence. Existence itself would there find its roots. In reply to a newspaper inquiry about his Course, Valéry said quite plainly: "I have made a system out of my observations of myself; I have tried to imagine my own modes of transformation, in their proper order, my 'possibility,' my repetitions, my limits, the conditions of my action and my preservation."<sup>4</sup>

Very few even of those who followed Valéry's course seem to have realized what he was about. To anyone, however, with the considerable advantage of reading the verbatim record of these lectures, there can be no doubt of what he was doing: he was systematizing the findings of a lifelong exploration of his own mind at work. The first twenty-nine lectures were devoted to elaborating the dynamics of sensibility and the relation of sensibility to the various arts and intellectual disciplines. It is from these lectures that I have drawn the scheme of his aesthetic theory. Of the ideas presented here, a good many will no doubt be familiar to readers of Valéry, for they are to be found scattered through his work. Valéry repeated his principal themes over and over. But nowhere in his published work, I believe, is the *system* of his ideas, their right relation to one another, to be as clearly seen as in the Course in *Poietics*. Space allows me little more than an outline of his theory, but that, after all, is the present purpose.

First, however, I must excuse my use of the word *Poietics* in a somewhat unfamiliar form, reminiscent of its origin in the Greek *poiein* (to make), and surviving in English only in a few scientific terms. Valéry confessed in his *Introduction to Poietics* that he wished, but did not dare, to give the term this form in French, to designate the true subject of his Course. It is no doubt both rash and easy for an American to say so, but I think he should have dared, since the traditional form which he did use (in English, *Poetics*) created a general misunderstanding. His subject was not the Art of Poetry, but included it. It was a larger and prior subject, identifiable in English terms as the creative process, but conceived in its greatest possible generality as *the mind's act of making*. Valéry's aim was nothing less than a complete and systematic description of the mind at work, producing all the "works of the mind." I should not have presumed finally, however, to say *Poietics* were it not for the further fact that Valéry himself, in his own notes and papers, never ceased to use the word *Poietique*.

4. "Ma Poétique," *Gazette de Lausanne*, 26 April 1942.

## 1

The major terms in Valéry's theory of the creative process are *sensibility* and *act*.

Sensibility is the ground of individual being. It occupies the same place in his thought as the *Cogito* does in Descartes'; it is the most general possible notion of life itself. Sensibility is *what we are*; and it becomes, or produces, *what we know*. It is the source of ourselves. At bottom it is unknown and perhaps unknowable—like consciousness, that "pure self" that hovers over our being. Yet sensibility may be partly known. It is the source and object of the only self-knowledge we have. Valéry's aesthetic theory is founded on the conviction that the whole life of the mind, all its modes of knowledge—the arts, philosophy, mathematics, the sciences—are traceable to their origins in sensibility.

The second major term, *act*, seems to be the secret motive of Valéry's thought. An act to his mind is perhaps the only thing in the world that is really mysterious. It is that which transforms possibility into actuality, the mode and moment of creation itself. It was Valéry's notion that life's deepest function is to make. To *know* is to *do*, to *perceive* is to *produce*. The primary fact about sensibility itself is that it is not merely passive and receptive, like a photographic plate, but is by nature active, productive; it is a constant spontaneous producer. What it normally produces is a regular flow of heterogeneous responses, or as Valéry prefers to say, "exchanges with the external world." What we feel to be *our presence*, or the presence of things to us is due to this constant production of exchanges by the sensibility. Our relation with the world is a sort of high frequency wave of sensibility in which colors, sounds, things, beings and so forth, form a continuum.

This normal state of production Valéry called "the natural course of things"—a curiously unsatisfactory term but he never found a better. The "natural course of things" is a state in which our organism is running silently like a good engine, a state of *non-attention* in which we are unaware of its functioning, a state likewise in which the external world is held in relative stability for us. This is important, for if our senses were a thousand times keener, if they were aware (let us say) of molecular movement, we should be forced to perceive the world as being constantly destroyed and reconstructed, and this would, to say the least, complicate our physical and psychic stability.

From the mind's point of view, the "natural course" of sensibility is the very image of disorder, the sensibility being constantly besieged by quite heterogeneous impressions from the world of things. This gives rise to a perpetual excitation, a constant diversity of meaningless and nameless productions, by nature incoherent, instantaneous, and unstable. This disorder is basic to the mind; it furnishes at once the matter and the motive for the construction of order, which is the mind's work.

The first step towards order is sensation as it becomes distinct from general sensibility. A sensation is an *event* occurring within the ambient disorder of the natural course of things; it is an interruption of the natural course, a sudden accentuation of some element in it, an increase in normal activity, a deviation from the normal state of non-attention. Sensation is sensibility of the second degree. It plays a great rôle in the mind; sensations are "original facts" or "points of origin" for very complex developments. Our whole physiological and psychological being confers value on them and at the same time serves as the *milieu* for their propagation. Every sensible event arises from the background of confusion and incoherence which we all see in ourselves and which really defines what we are moment by moment.

These are the basic terms of Valéry's psychology: the *natural course of sensibility* on the one hand, and on the other, *sensations*. The life of sensibility is a capricious fluctuation between these two poles. The sensibility always seems to be trying either to absorb and annul events of sensation and return to its own natural course of exchanges with the world, or on the other hand, to interrupt this equilibrium once it is established. Variability is its most important trait.

## 2

Valéry found the beginnings of the aesthetic activity in the sensibility's *peculiar economy*. It is a strange fact, he said, that we produce more sensations than we need and have more perceptions than we need simply to satisfy our organic requirements. Most of the impressions we receive through our senses play no rôle whatever in the functioning of the vital organs that keep us living. Only an extremely small portion of the vast number of sensory impulses that besiege us momentarily is necessary or can be utilized in our biological functions. The greater part of our sensations are actually *useless*.

But not only do we produce more sensations than we need, we also perform more *acts* than we need simply to stay alive, and we are in fact capable of far more acts than we perform. We contain a whole realm of possible acts, which Valéry called our *implex*. We have a sort of possibility of choice among the things we do, and it is because of this great reserve of possible acts that we are able to adapt our actions to circumstances. But it is also because of the excess of our possible acts that we draw, sing, and dance, and perform a large number of perfectly arbitrary acts that serve no practical purpose.

Out of these *useless* sensations and *arbitrary* acts man has created a special domain of activity, the arts. Creative activity consists in conferring *utility* upon useless sensations and *necessity* upon arbitrary acts.

This is possible because of a special feature of the artistic process which Valéry called the "aesthetic infinite." The pleasure of certain sensations



may excite us to renew them, to repeat them over and over. Or a certain sensation may excite us to seek others related to it in the sensibility. In short, it is a remarkable fact that a sensation may create in us the need to repeat it, an independent need not arising from any of our organic functions nor serving any practical end. Any one of our senses, of sight, touch, hearing, or movement, may induce us to prolong a particular sensation, or to increase its intensity. To feel of an object in the hand is to appreciate a certain order of touch, of contact, and to have a resulting notion of a whole possible *group* of contacts. While feeling of the object, without seeing or recognizing it, proceeding entirely by touch, we may be led little by little to repeat the process for its own sake. That is, the process excites interest in itself, and little by little we lose the sense of the *arbitrariness* of the original act. We begin to feel a connection, a *necessity* arising between what we are doing and what we have just done. In short, we are involved in a sequence of sensations which compose something, and we have created a necessity of the second degree. Feelings of vital or organic necessity and utility are common to us all, but this second kind of utility and necessity is not felt by everyone. Those who feel it have the gift of art. A man who is an artist may feel a kind of necessity in a particular order of sensations coming to him from nature or from some art object, where another man feels nothing whatever.

The process just described, originating in sensibility and guided in its development by sensibility, is very different from any act serving a practical end. For example when hunger, an organic need, is satisfied, the sensibility ceases to produce sensations of hunger. But in the case of an aesthetic need, a need of the second degree, we find this peculiar economy: that satisfaction arouses need, supply creates demand, sensation excites expectation, calls for repetition, reproduces itself. There is no stopping point, nothing to annul the reciprocal excitation. It may even become pathological. In short we have a case of sustained sensibility. Art organizes a system of sensible things in such a way that they have the power to arouse desire for themselves, but cannot annul the desire they arouse. A work of art always sustains the sensibility that produced it. This circular effect Valéry called "the aesthetic infinite." He did not mean the word "infinite" here to be taken literally, but rather as an indication of a continuous reciprocal action within the sensibility.

Another feature of sensibility fundamental to art is its tendency to form within itself what Valéry called "universes." This rather imposing term has no connection with what is ordinarily called the "Universe." Unlike Margaret Fuller, Valéry did not at all accept the universe; it was the constant butt of his wit and destructive analysis. The term "universe of sensibility" is a figure probably adopted from group theory in mathematics. A universe of sensibility is simply "a closed system of internal relations among sen-

sations of the same order." The sensibility, though at bottom disorderly, has a working tendency towards order. It tends to oppose its own disorder with an order at one remove. Valéry's *Poïetics* is based on the conviction that all the functions of sensibility may be formulated, their order found. "Since we are composed of organs," he said, "such as the retina and the muscle, specialized for certain uses, each reacting in a limited and predictable way, it is impossible that we should *not* find a system of fundamental relations in us."

Valéry was almost, but not quite, willing to speak of "laws" of sensibility; for he found in the sensibility certain fundamental tendencies or modes of reaction: symmetry, contrast, periodicity, and complementarity. These features of regularity constitute intrinsic relations among sensations of the same order, thus forming closed groups or "universes." The sensibility tends quite spontaneously to create these universes within itself. The ear, for example, spontaneously separates sound from noise. Sound may be defined as those noises which the sensibility chooses to reproduce. It is this same grouping activity in the sense of hearing, carried to a further point of refinement, that has produced the scales which are the "universe" of music. The same tendency in another organ of sense, the eye, has given us the chromatic universe of the color chart, which underlies painting. These "universes" form the substance of the several arts. The arts are possible because man can master the spontaneous "universes" of his sensibility and play upon them by means of symmetries, similitudes, and contrasts, which are the essential properties of all, at least of the non-representational arts.

Valéry differed sharply from his Symbolist forebears on the question of correspondence between the senses. The various senses are not to be compared; they are really incommensurable and without communication between themselves. We cannot express color by sound. The universes of sense exist, each to itself, and yet taken together they are ourselves. We are made of a basic incoherence of sensibility cut across by these self-consistent and independent universes which appear in us under sensory excitement.

Among the various senses, Valéry had great partiality for the eye. This was the sense closest to the mind, the most intelligent of the senses, most like consciousness itself. In his poems and drawings the eye is consciousness. An interviewer once asked him what invention he thought would be most beneficial to mankind, and Valéry, to express the mental exhaustion that plagued him in his later years, replied, "An eyelid for the mind."<sup>8</sup> The eye in its ability to produce complementary colors furnishes the plainest and most convincing evidence of the sensibility's productivity. When exposed to a strong red light, the eye responds by producing green.

5. Marcelle Routier in *Marianne*, 18 January 1939.

This complementarity takes place as a gradually dying oscillation between two colors, or between light and dark, demonstrating periodic variation in the eye's productive process. Valéry took this as an indication of the periodicity of all sensibility, which is one of the "laws" of his sensory dynamics. But complementarity is not the only internal relation among chromatic sensations. There is also the phenomenon of sensory continuity, the progression from one color to another by imperceptible gradations. These two phenomena, continuity and complementarity, together form the basis of a complex system of relations within the group of colors, which is to say they form a "chromatic universe."

Perhaps we have come to the point at which we must be reminded that Valéry's point of view is not that of the physicist or the physiologist. He describes sensation always from the point of view of the mind, that is, from the point of view of our consciousness of sensation. He warns us that the capacity of our sensibility to respond by motor reflexes and bodily secretions is not to be confused, as it is by physiologists, with the fact of sensation. He saw color, not as a certain range of light frequencies observed by the physicist but rather as a closed group of sensations produced by the eye. He could not accept Fechner's law establishing a mathematical relation between the energy of a stimulus and the intensity of a so-called sensation. What Fechner measured, he said, was not a sensation but a reflex that accompanies sensation, something external to consciousness. Sensation, said Valéry, is cut off from all means of external observation and creates its own observer which is the self.

Auditory sensations, like those of the eye, also constitute a universe. As the sensibility spontaneously separates *sound* from *noise*, it further classifies sounds to form the scales in music. Scales are natural or spontaneous creations in the sensibility. Just as green is not for the eye a certain degree of red (as it is for the physicist), so a high note in music is not for the ear a certain degree of a low note. For the ear there is an absolute distinction in quality between high and low. Therefore a high note and a low note have really two relations in sensibility, one of quality and one of degree.

But after the eye, the next most important order of sensation to Valéry's mind was neuro-muscular or motor sensation. For example, it is by means of our "inner muscular adaptation" that sound is translated into degrees that are measurable. When we hear a sound, our two ears necessarily receive each a slightly different impression, but by a kind of "neuro-muscular triangulation" they *produce* a single sensation corresponding to the original sound. Muscular sensation, for Valéry, was the great intermediary between the various immediate kinds of sensation on the one hand and our various psychic organizations (ideas and so forth) on the other. He believed that functions of the motor system give rise to our intellectual abstractions. In combinations of touch and muscular sensations of movement he saw a whole system of tactile-motor possibilities.

Anyone subtle enough, he said, in his senses of touch and movement, a sculptor for example, will be aware of a two-way reciprocal oscillation, a form of complementarity, between these two senses. Each requires the other.

All the arts are special adaptations of the various universes of sensibility. In so far as the arts have recourse to sensation, they are obliged to build on the features of regularity, periodicity, and reciprocal excitation which form groups of sensations within the sensibility. The several arts are founded on the properties of these sensory groups.

## 3

The sensibility alone, however, is helpless to produce a work of art. There is a capital difference between the spontaneous products of the sensibility just described and those productions of the whole man which are works of art. In art there must be an intervention of the conscious processes of the mind, of which *attention* is the general type. The total creative act is a combination of conscious and unconscious processes terminated in motivity by an externalizing act that produces the work, after which the mental structure responsible for producing it is dissolved back into the heterogeneous activity of the natural course of sensibility: this notion of the creative process as the most complete, the most fully human act of which man is capable, Valéry calls *the cycle of the complete act*.

Works of art, or as Valéry preferred to say, "works of the mind," are those works which the mind chooses to make for itself, for its own use and benefit, works that aim to act upon the sensibility and intellect, with no practical or utilitarian purpose. A work is something undertaken by the mind *against its own nature*, and something which tends to affect the mind of another, to cause in another the creation of value. Artists are those men who feel the mind's need of an external act and a material object on which to impose not what the mind itself is but the contrary of what it is: form, causality, finality, and duration which the mind does not possess. In short, the act that creates a work must be considered as the end and final term of a transformation within the producer, the artist.

A work of art is a violation of nature. In the making of it there is always a mysterious disproportion between cause and effect. The production of a work of art can never be reduced to a prescribed series of acts, known beforehand. The end of the creative act will always lie partly in *terra incognita*. In any work of art there is always something absolutely idiosyncratic and personal. Any artist has two very different attributes: one is his knowledge of techniques and special processes, that part of him which is expressible and transmissible; the other is the native gift, the peculiar personal habit, the absolutely private and untransmissible property of the individual. It is easy to understand this distinction, but nearly impossible to observe it in particular cases. In Titian, for example, we

cannot distinguish the great and unique painter from the remarkable technician. Anyone might have transmitted to us the techniques of Venetian painting, but no one else could have given us the works of Titian. Any art may be learned, but never the whole art.

4

Valéry thinks of the arts as in two kinds: the arts of pure sensibility and the arts of language. Among the former are music, architecture, the dance, sculpture, and painting; the arts of language are primarily poetry and philosophy, though Valéry somewhat reluctantly admits the novel, the drama, and history.

Within each of the two kinds there is a further distinction between the purer arts, those that more nearly answer the demands of pure sensibility, and the representational or signifying arts which aim to bear a meaningful relation to the material world: for example, among the first, music as opposed to representational painting; and among the second, poetry as opposed to philosophy or the novel.

There can be no such thing as pure art, yet the effort of all art is to be pure. A pure art would be one that contained only functions of sensibility, without the intervention of consciousness on the one hand, or meaningful reference to the accidental circumstances of life on the other. The effort of art is to construct out of the heterogeneous matter of life a homogeneous and absolute system which would be complete and self-sufficient, as if the world did not exist. The universe created by music and painting may have almost no reference to a world outside themselves, being composed almost entirely of intrinsic relations. However, they affect us as being the most *general* of all systems.

Nearly pure works of art are those isolated systems from which all chance combinations are as nearly as possible eliminated. When a composer of music hears a "chance sound" which may be a germ for a piece of music, he does not *explain* the sound to himself in its "significant" relations; he does not say, for instance, "that was a hammer striking." He rather relates it to a group of sounds that may be elaborated. He separates out the associations "hammer striking," "man at work," and so forth, and constructs from one sound a whole system that may be said to be pre-existent in him. Any artist's work consists of "fractioning," separating out the *matter of life*, treating it so as to precipitate or filter out its imitative, human, and signifying elements. The impurities that remain (and there are always some, since pure works do not exist any more than pure bodies exist in physics or chemistry), these impurities hold the work of art in a permanent relation to the permanent and vital disorder of life.

Valéry's distinction between the arts of pure sensibility and the arts of language is made necessary by his conception of the nature of language. There is a natural opposition between language and sensibility. Language



is so closely related to consciousness as to be hardly distinguishable from it; it is the instrument of consciousness used to extract ideas and the like from sensibility. Language is not one of the natural formations of sensibility; it is acquired. There are no relations between words in a dictionary making it comparable to the scales in music or the color chart. The dictionary is not one of the spontaneous universes of sensibility. The substance of language is conventions and signs; a word is a perfectly arbitrary relation between a term and an idea. If words were not arbitrary we should know all the languages.

Language is thus discontinuous with sensibility; it is a kind of "interruptor" in the French sense, that is, an "electric switch" in our inner selves. An artist is never so entirely subject to his sensibility that he does not continually emit judgments, lateral expressions, ideas and so forth—a whole hidden critical activity not necessarily directly perceived even by the one in whom it takes place. This is language in the act of entering, penetrating the sensibility. Language guarantees discontinuity, it is the means of passing from one subject or idea to another, of getting outside a rigorous development within the sensibility. This is the rôle of language in all the arts.

It is a curious fact that none of the arts would be possible without language, even the purer arts, for it is language that keeps the artist from becoming a victim of his sensibility. An artist must master his sensibility, he must be clearly conscious of its universes, able to enter them and leave them at will, to accept or refuse what they offer. Here we see the difference between art and dream. A dream is a development in pure sensibility; we are merely its victim. But an artist is not asleep, he is not a dreamer, as the vulgar notion of "inspiration" would have it. He must rule his sensibility, and he does this by means of language, including its most rudimentary forms, as judgments, or signs. The kind of control we exert, for example, in exercising our sense of proportion is at bottom quite probably the work of language. We could not use the sensibility at all, even to look at a simple object, without a minimum of control; we could not follow a conversation without cutting out certain associations of words. Sensibility alone cannot produce works of art with a beginning, middle, and end; it must be interrupted, opposed, and solicited according to an overall plan. Language makes possible the overall plan.

## 5

Poetry is the most difficult of the arts for the reason that language, being conventional and learned, does not form a natural universe in sensibility on which an art may be based. The language of poetry must try to signify and at the same time to exist in a group of rhythms and sounds. The problem of poetry is to combine sensibility and signification, that is, values of sensory truth with values of memory-truth. Poetry is always a com-



promise reached by mutual sacrifices, or abuses, in these two domains. Verse drama, for instance, must frequently sacrifice sound to sense. Actually it is the *abuses* of language that form the "universe" of poetry, not language as it exists in the dictionary. The poet has an extraordinary sense of language; he is so much a master of it that he knows how to violate and abuse it. Poetry is essentially an abuse of language.

Valéry was responsible in the late twenties for a highly advertised debate on the notion of "pure poetry." The term has continued to be associated with his name, and somewhat mistakenly used to describe his poems. Looking back on the whole question in 1938, Valéry said: "I have never used the term 'pure' applied to poetry except in the sense given to the term in physics and chemistry—i.e., meaning a quality got by a process of separation. I merely wondered whether one could take certain poems and separate out the poetic element and then make other poems entirely out of this element. The Abbé Bremond saw something mystical in that, which was not part of my intention. From the first I have said that 'pure poetry' is *not* possible. Language is not made for that. Language is practical. I merely say that when you take as much interest in the *form* of language as in its meaning . . . , you are interested in poetry."

For Valéry, music was theoretically the greatest of the arts. I say theoretically because he was in fact not a great music-lover; he was rather impatient with most music. His life-long devotion to Wagner was surely not unrelated to the composer's interest in theory.

"Music is like a sea," said Valéry, "it makes us feel by the movements of its surface all its depth." . . . "In hearing a piece of music we sense the whole system of which it is a part. Music makes us feel within us the sensations of some incomparable transformation, so that we feel ourselves to be both creators and created at once, both the builder and the building, both master and slave of a particular form, a form of time that is completely foreign to the time of ordinary experience, a time that takes hold of us, carries us away, and has nothing to do with the incoherent and signifying world of ordinary experience. In short, all possible music is in some way virtually implied in the particular work we listen to. What we actually hear creates the effect, but all music is in its depths and background."

Similarly with all the arts; it is their business to make us perceive the total possibility each of its own universe. Every art should make us perceive a total existence in possibility. The single work of art is a disturbance in the total order it represents, as the strings of a harp are disturbed by plucking, whereas the *still* strings of a harp represent the total order of possibility, the general system of all sonority. Any piece of music is a mode of *departing* from silence and *returning* to it. And since the act of perception takes time, all the arts, whether we think of them as temporal or spatial, follow the same pattern as music, the pattern of *departure and return*.

Naturally, the arts excite other responses too, besides the perception of a total order beyond them. They stir memories, impulses of love, and so forth. Music, though non-representational, can move nearly the whole of pure sensibility. The musician works directly on the quick, the living nerve.

Another of the great pure arts for Valéry was architecture. For him a work of architecture was not immobile, since in order to be seen it requires an observer who moves around and through it, creating its forms, combinations, and perspectives as he goes. This is the movement of architecture. All its forms must be deducible one from another by a kind of modulation.

The "universe" of architecture is our *sense of proportion*. The sensibility does not know mathematical proportion. When we see a rectangle, for instance, we do not know its measurements in meters, but rather its proportions in relation to what is around it. This is so because we never see directly, but in perspective; objects are always projections for us. No one has ever actually seen a rectangle, for a rectangle can only be seen as a trapezoid. Geometry takes no account of the *situation* of objects. It has measurements, but only sensibility has the sense of proportion. This sense can best be described in action: if an object is not in the right proportion, the sensibility launches an effort to modify the object, to make it right. If it is right, the sensibility is at rest, in equilibrium. That is the only "measurement" sensibility knows how to use.

As a boy in school, Paul Valéry copied into a notebook hundreds of drawings and definitions from Viollet-le-Duc's dictionary of architecture. He conceived the notion, soon abandoned, of inventing three different units of measurement in architecture, corresponding to the three directions in which measurement is applied, horizontally, vertically, or in depth—in short, measurement conceived from the point of view of the eye, of consciousness, which is always Valéry's point of view. For the eye sees a meter differently in each of the three directions. He was working on the analogy of the three fundamental units in mechanics: length, time, and mass; and his aim was to create a heterogeneous system of measurement in accord with the heterogeneity of our sense of dimension. The constant effort to translate the concepts of physics and mathematics to the inner world of man remained one of the central preoccupations of Valéry's life.

The most surprising and, to some including myself, a rather annoying aspect of Valéry's aesthetic is his treatment of philosophy. Here he was undoubtedly indulging in shock tactics. Valéry distinguishes between *constructive* (or creative) philosophy, by which he generally means metaphysics, and *critical* philosophy. He defines constructive philosophy as establishing a series of notions, and relations between notions, with the intention of describing the world. Critical philosophy is parasitic in the biological sense; it lives on other philosophy or on science, by analyzing

them. It has become the handmaiden of science as it was the handmaiden of theology in the Middle Ages.

At bottom the philosophic activity is based on the *question*, and the question as a phenomenon is an excitation of imbalance or discontinuity in the "natural course" of sensibility. For instance, just as the iris of the eye enlarges its area of exposure when the light is dim, so, when we hear a noise, we suddenly increase to a maximum our sensitivity to the noise. This is the mechanism of the question at the level of sensibility. However abstract it may be, or "sublime" as they used to say about philosophic questions, our first reaction is an awakening attention, a kind of anxiety which is a question in the sensibility.

The power of sensibility to produce questions really defines the intellect. Intelligence is a network of questions. The great majority of the events of sensibility pass unnoticed; we ignore far more than we take in and formulate as knowledge. Most of the products of sensibility remain meaningless, but some call for the participation of our whole being; and these become our knowledge. "The vast forest of our sense impressions," said Valéry, "is the game-preserve where our questions go hunting."

In the philosophic activity, Valéry found the same "peculiar economy," the same "aesthetic infinite," the same "universe" of sensibility as in the other arts. Our animal nature, he said, is furnished with more possibilities than are required for our daily practical maintenance. This is the source of our curiosity, which is simply an excess of response by the sensibility to what is around us. Metaphysics is the result of curiosity in excess of our need and use of *things*. It is an exercise in the use of questions as things in themselves.

Valéry compares philosophers to poets and painters, in this way: "If you look at an object too long," he says, "it loses its power of signifying, and becomes merely a spot of color—you are about to become a painter. If you say a word over and over, it loses its power of signifying, and becomes a sound—you are about to become a poet. If you ask a question over and over, turning over its terms in your mind, it loses its ordinary meaning and—you are about to become a philosopher."

The philosopher abuses questions and answers as the poet abuses language itself. There is no limit to the question method. In mathematics, definitions are acts, or lead to acts; but in philosophy there is no act or object to limit the abuse of terms. If there were, philosophy would be stricken with sterility. A question in sensibility becomes a question in philosophy simply by the intervention of language. By translating the questioning attitude into words instead of acts, we get this curious result: we detach or mobilize the questioning attitude, set it going in the self-developing cycle of the "aesthetic infinite." This means that we have converted the questioning attitude into free play, like practising scales on a piano; it is on the way to becoming an art. All you have to do, said Valéry,

to discover for yourself the great traditional philosophic questions is to apply the five interrogative adverbs to any subject whatever. When you come to apply them to a subject not capable of precise definition, because not subject to demonstration in act, you are already in the field of philosophy.

The question reaches its final stage of development as art in its use as an element in philosophic discourse. The work of Thomas Aquinas is the classical case. Here the question has come to its perfection as form. The basic "article" of the *Summa* resembles a poem in fixed form, like a sonnet. Compared to the work of Albertus Magnus, said Valéry, the work of Aquinas shows a development that must be described as essentially aesthetic.

Valéry thus set up an "aesthetic program for philosophy." A work of philosophy can only be properly understood and praised as an aesthetic construction. Philosophy has no power of action; it can only present us "a world" as a work of art, like a poem, a symphony, a painting—a world that is not the world in the general sense of that term, but rather the world of a particular philosopher who is its creator or builder.

Philosophy then is a *matter of form*, and at its center we always find its maker. Philosophy must be personal, based on the man who produces it. When Descartes said "I think, therefore I am," he meant among other things: "I am going to center upon myself all I know." Every philosophic structure must be built around a self; this is the essential condition of greatness in philosophy. Truth is not its criterion. Plato and Spinoza thought they were expressing truth, but we know it is not so; they expressed *their truth*, which is quite a different matter, precisely a matter of art. An artist's truth is in his sensibility, and the same may be said of philosophers. Plato and Spinoza do not increase our external power, they teach us the pace and structure of their own minds. All that is left of any theory once it is outmoded is its personal meaning and elegance in terms of its author's mind. Philosophy should give up its pretensions to explanation. The great philosophies are the expression of great individuals. Philosophy must make for itself a *literary* career. Only in this perspective can the great philosophies of the past be saved.

## 6

In 1937, at the moment when he was formulating the general plan of his Course in Poïetics, Valéry was invited to address the Second International Congress of Aesthetics and the Science of Art, meeting in Paris. What he said on that occasion was not calculated to comfort the assembled aestheticians. Traditional philosophical aesthetics, he said, has been a failure in its own terms, in so far as it has thought it could define, measure, and formulate the principles of art. Loyalty to its own mode of discourse, to the point of making discourse an end in itself, has disqualified philosophical

aesthetics from describing the creative process. What the artist makes cannot be logically deduced from what he started with; it is this fact more than anything else which assures him that he has created something.

The failure of aesthetics in its own terms, however, has been curiously fruitful for art itself. Its formulations, its reasoned conventions and rules have played an active rôle in the making of art. They help the mind to constrain the sensibility, which is the essence of the creative act. Aesthetics, said Valéry, should give up the ambition to formulate ultimate definitions and principles. Its more modest business is to describe what can actually be observed of the artistic process. To this form of aesthetics Valéry devoted the best thought of his mature years.

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## EDITORIAL COMMENT

By L. C. Breunig

IF THE English Institute selected Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Valéry for its symposium on the "Poetics of French Symbolism" it is not necessarily because these four enjoy an exclusive reputation as the major poets of the last century in France. Many a Frenchman, in fact, prefers the dynamic flow of the odes of Claudel, the heir of Rimbaud, to the highly distilled verse of Valéry, as a disciple of Mallarmé. Others find in Apollinaire's best lines an elusive, mysterious beauty which puts him in the front ranks of the Symbolist tradition. Furthermore, there are poets such as Laforgue and Corbière who, in individual cases, have perhaps had a more direct and personal influence upon contemporary English and American poetry than those under consideration.

What undoubtedly unites these four, however, and explains their dominance over the Symbolist movement outside of France as well as within is their acute awareness of their art and of its originality. With these writers poetry became supremely conscious of itself. In each case the inspired creator is sustained and guided by a keen critic who knows the tenets of his particular poetic vision. These poets have themselves created in large part the theoretical terminology of their work, and such abstract concepts as "symbole," "correspondance," "hallucination," "alchimie," "le hasard vaincu," "la sensibilité et l'acte" illustrate a series of integrated doctrines which could conceivably exist apart from the masterpieces which they underlie. In Baudelaire and in each of his three successors are combined the elements of artist and theoretician which we often associate with two distinct persons in a literary movement, from Racine and Boileau to Eluard and Breton.

Thus it is particularly fitting to refer to the "poetics" of these four Symbolists. They are not simply bards or songsters but, as Baudelaire puts it, "sovereignly intelligent" poets. The miracle is that the doctrines and the critical acumen, far from stifling the poetry, richly inform it, giving it its distinctive qualities and its unity.

This does not mean, however, that the poets were necessarily eager to divulge their systems. With the possible exception of Valéry one finds no neat, systematic discourse on method, no single expository essay entitled "My Poetics." One must sift their correspondence, their criticisms of other artists, their prefaces and replies to interviews, not to mention the poetry itself, before one emerges with the ensemble of the principles. For Baudelaire one must count heavily upon certain articles of the *Curiosités esthétiques* and *L'Art romantique*, particularly those on Delacroix, Gautier and Hugo, together with excerpts from letters such as those to Alphonse Toussenel and A. de Calonne, upon which Mr. Hubert has placed such



emphasis, as well as his notes for a preface to *Les Fleurs du mal*. Mallarmé's brief and aphoristic pronouncements on his art are scattered over a period of thirty-five years, from the relatively straightforward little essay entitled "L'Art pour tous" at the age of twenty to those entitled "Crise de vers" and "Le Mystère dans les lettres," published in *Divagations* the year before his death. Moreover, as the doctrine is slowly elaborated the expression of it tends to become more cryptic, and restatements of attitudes appear with variants and shifts of emphasis which the student of Mallarmé must examine carefully.

As for Rimbaud, aside from the confessions in *Une Saison en enfer*, one must depend almost entirely upon his correspondence of which only two letters, those to Georges Izambard and Paul Demeny in 1871, present anything approaching a treatise on poetry. Valéry alone has attempted a systematic exposition of his philosophy, especially and most explicitly in the lectures which he presented to the Collège de France during the last years of his life; but even here we must keep in mind that the bulk of his speculations exist in the form of notes and that the subject is not precisely the poetics of Paul Valéry but rather Valéry's theories of "poïetics" or the broader process of creation, "the mind's act of making," as Mr. Mathews has described it.

There are of course the poems. To what extent can one make use of certain individual pieces, from *Correspondances* on, not merely as illustrations but also as actual statements of the poetics? Is it permissible to reverse the normal process and to deduce from the poetry clarifications of the doctrines? This would seem particularly justified with the Symbolists since, more than with any other school, their masterpieces are so often poems about poetry. One cannot appreciate the essence of Mallarmé's theories, for example, without a careful analysis of "Toast funèbre, à Théophile Gautier," as Mr. Ramsey points out. This method, however, is fraught with danger, for it is equally true that Symbolist poetry is perhaps richer than any other in multiple meanings, including even those pieces which are accepted as manifestoes.

It is fairly obvious then that an essay on the poetics of any one of these Symbolists is no easy task. A modicum of conjecture is almost inevitable, and the vast critical bibliography already existing on these four poets illustrates the variety of possible interpretations not only of single poems but of the principles. The four essays which have been presented here use the only legitimate method, which is to investigate honestly the poets' own intentions. Three of them support these intentions with passages from both the poetry and the critical writing which they consider most pertinent. The case of Valéry is different. Mr. Mathews has rendered an invaluable service by offering a thoroughly objective expository essay on the substance of Valéry's philosophy of "poïetics," which is available for the most part only in the still unpublished notebooks. Mr. Ramsey, warning against

any facile deductions that might be drawn from individual prose comments, has stressed the slow elaboration of Mallarmé's doctrine from the "Hérésies artistiques" to "Le Mystère dans les lettres," pointing out its basic continuity despite the fluctuations which separate the young Parnassian from the older Olympian who attempted *Un Coup de dés*. Mr. Frohock has cut through the myths and the more fantastic interpretations of Rimbaud to the bed rock of the *lettre du voyant* and has modestly emerged with the word "epiphany" as perhaps the most apt description of the particular kind of insight which Rimbaud was consciously seeking to produce. Mr. Hubert alone pleads guilty to "conjecture" as he illustrates from several selections of *Les Fleurs du mal* his thesis that Baudelaire's originality lies less in his poetic tastes and theories, in which he resembled the Romantics, than in his sense of form and his belief in a transcendent poetic reality. The intentional use of ambiguous imagery is the principal device by which Baudelaire, according to Mr. Hubert, achieves the autonomy of the "poetic order."

Does an overall Symbolist poetics derive from these four essays? The authors have carefully avoided any generalizations concerning the movement as a whole, and one is in fact surprised by the almost total absence of the term "Symbolism" from their analyses. Apparently it is looked upon as little more than a convenient catchword and, except as it has been hallowed by usage, no more applicable theoretically than any of a number of other conceivable terms which, had it not been for the manifesto of Jean Moréas, one might have coined or still might coin, such as "analogism," "immaculism," "epiphanism," or "purism."

The fact that these four essays span almost a century, from the appearance of *Les Fleurs du mal* to the eve of Valéry's death, indicates in itself that the term has been stretched far beyond the limits of the school of 1885, in which Mallarmé alone, among the four poets, actively participated. It must be pointed out, however, that the adjective "symboliste" is nonetheless used currently in France to describe a style peculiar to the end of the nineteenth century, an esoteric style both precious and effusive of which, incidentally, some of the youthful letters of the recently published correspondence between Gide and Valéry offer an excellent example. One must perhaps distinguish, therefore, in speaking of Symbolism, between a style and a doctrine. If the more effete and superficial mannerisms conveying the "soul-states" of the *fin de siècle* already seemed outmoded as early as 1900 the more profound revolution in the concept of poetry which the three major Symbolists had proclaimed, was to retain its full vigor and influence.

This concept would seem to rest upon a paradox. On the one hand the basic assumption that the poem should be offered up simply as itself presupposes the highest possible degree of intellectual supervision in the creation of the poem. If it is no longer a representation of reality but a

thing possessing its own autonomous existence and structure—and in practice this means that the poem, instead of developing a sequence of more or less logically related ideas similar, albeit in verse form, to prose discourse, actually presents a complex network of subtle analogies or a unified medley of discontinuous images—the creation of such an object requires the most conscious, rational control over its birth, if it is to have life.

On the other hand these eminently intellectual capacities of the poet are wilfully, even stubbornly, turned toward the one province which will not admit them, the world of the totally irrational, whether it be the unconscious substrata of the mind within the poet or the transcendent world beyond human reason, which lies above him. The well-nigh impossible task of pursuing a "*raisonné dérèglement*," of giving form to that which by its very nature is amorphous, accounts not only for the fascinating new techniques which the poets were obliged to evolve but also for a preponderance of new subject matter, for the poets soon became aware that the sheer emotional intensity of such a heroic effort and the deep despair and anguish which accompanied the birth pangs constituted in themselves a more dynamic theme than the traditional subjects of lyric poetry. It also accounts in part for the esteem in which these poets are held today; the high idealism of such an enterprise, the courageous will, against the insurmountable odds of dictionary words, to express the inexpressible, was to make a profound impression upon the younger poets of the twentieth century and did, in fact, shape in a large measure the course of modern poetry.

One of the more important corollaries of the Symbolist concept and one which the essays presented here have properly stressed is the belief on the part of the poet himself that a multiplicity of interpretations of each poem is not only permissible but desirable. If the poem is self-subsistent and if it consists of a network of ever-shifting overtones it follows that diverse interpretations are to be consciously sought for. This is particularly true of Mallarmé and Valéry, less so perhaps, of Rimbaud simply because he was less interested in the reader's reactions; but, if we are to accept Mr. Herbert's thesis, it is equally true of Baudelaire. Much twentieth-century criticism has of course been searching for "levels" in every poem since the *Iliad*, closing its eyes more often than not to the intentions of the author and his age. Beginning with the Symbolists, however, the author presumably intends and even hopes, as the poem leaves his pen, that it will be elastic enough to yield different readings. If this be true it is perhaps not too vain to hope that in Symbolism at least the often acrimonious debate opposing authors' intentions to readers' reactions may be amicably resolved.

The poets never intended, however, that elasticity of interpretation should lead to anarchy of interpretation. No reading of a line is justifiable

except as it remains faithful to the context of the poem as a unit; indeed the interpretation of each poem can be tested only as it fits into the entire work of its creator. Herein lies the particular value of these four essays which, wisely avoiding broad pronouncements on Symbolism as a whole, have sought to present the unifying doctrine of each individual poet. For, despite their numerous points of resemblance which are conveniently designated under the label of Symbolism, it is as four distinct personalities that one can appreciate them most deeply. Each one is "original" in the sense which Proust gave the word when he spoke of "le monde qui n'a pas été créé une fois, mais aussi souvent qu'un artiste original est survenu." We are dealing here with four separate "worlds," and we cannot fully understand any corner of them without knowing the whole topography of each one. These four essays have served as excellent guides for the exploration.

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## STUDIES IN FRENCH SYMBOLISM, 1945-1955

Review Article by Anna Balakian

ELUSIVE in meaning, dubious as a demarkation of literary epoch, the term "Symbolism"<sup>1</sup> has proved serviceable to literary historians in accounting for the developments of the post-Romantic era. To the French it still denotes, technically, the period between 1885 and 1895, during which as a literary movement Symbolism produced "cénacles," manifestoes, and literary periodicals. The Anglo-Saxon critic, taking his cue from Arthur Symons or T. S. Eliot, thinks of French Symbolism in terms of the big four of French poetry in the second part of the nineteenth century: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Mallarmé—to a lesser degree includes Laforgue, and by literary heritage Paul Valéry. From either point of view, the hybrid movement has presented a difficult research problem: the classification of material, profuse and heterogeneous, held together as a purely synthetic unit by a word possessing multiple connotations. Early works on Symbolism, those published particularly in the twenties, had fundamental failings: (1) they established a rigid hierarchy based more or less on the self-evaluation of the more voluble, though often less talented of the Symbolists; (2) they did not draw clear lines between theory and practice on the subject of Symbolist poetics; and (3) they used a vocabulary very subjective and very "symbolistic" in expression, principally under the dominating influence of the Jacques Rivère-Alain-Fournier language of literary appreciation.

Before a realignment could be attempted, a levelling process was necessary and the dispassionate approach of chroniclers. In this capacity may be viewed the works of two Americans: *La Wallonie* (N. Y.: King's Crown Press, 1947) of Jackson Mathews and *The Symbolist Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951) by Kenneth Cornell. Both authors avoid to a great extent any preconceived unity of thought in studying the variety of poetic and theoretical material grouped under the banner of Symbolism; instead, Mr. Mathews chooses the unity of place of publication, and Mr. Cornell the unifying element of time.

Mr. Mathews surveys the whole coterie of those who had literary works published in the Belgian journal, *La Wallonie*, between 1886 and 1892; through its annals, the characteristics that are made evident by repetition, imitation and emphasis, point out rather glaringly the fact that the coterie Symbolists were theorists rather than writers of poetry: "The characteristic activity of the school of 1885 was talking, thinking and writing about poetry."

1. In this essay Symbolism with the capital S will refer to the French literary school only.



In Mr. Cornell's year by year bibliographical account of poetic works that came to be associated with Symbolism there is a search for persistence of trade-mark features, for the turning points from certain poetic habits. But more significant than the demonstrations of common denominators is Mr. Cornell's attempt to bring the diversity into a new focus. Whereas it had been assumed that the disparity was the result of various innate tendencies trying to operate under an artificially united front, the author shows that there was a conscious desire among the poets to avoid a single pattern: "The resolve not to accept a pattern was stronger than the desire to create a formula." Going beyond an exposition of the Symbolists' common reaction against static descriptive poetry, Mr. Cornell lays a new emphasis on the *carte blanche* attitude of the coterie toward the variety of methods of achieving new forms of poetic expression.

Within the essentially historical framework of these two studies no specific step is taken to separate the wheat from the chaff. Other recent studies have ventured beyond the chronicle, seeking some form of synthesis of Symbolist qualities. Guy Michaud's monumental works, *Message poétique du symbolisme* (Paris: Nizet, 1947, 3 vols.) and *Doctrine symboliste* (Paris: Nizet, 1947), stress the metaphysical homogeneity of the movement. Mr. Michaud admits that he has systematically avoided questions of poetic technique (an aspect sorely in need of elucidation) in order to concentrate on doctrine. As a result he retains the social groupings of such technically diverse poets as Saint-Pol-Roux, Francis Jammes and Paul Fort. Defining Symbolism in broad terms as an attitude of mind which is able to grasp both subjectively and objectively the analogies and correspondences in the universe, he accords a life span of fifty years to the movement and considers its greatest contribution to lie in the field of metaphysical expression. Within the broad non-critical scope of his definition, he retains a number of the minor authors who figure in the genealogy left by André Barre, and he is non-discriminatingly generous in the number of poets which he includes in the heritage of Symbolism.

On the other hand, a Dane, Svend Johansen (*Le Symbolisme*, Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard, 1945), felt the need to thin out the ranks, tried to do it on the basis of "consciousness of style," which automatically placed Mallarmé on top, and eliminated those whose inclusion was purely a matter of contemporaneity; he contented himself with passing remarks on Maeterlinck, Verlaine and Laforgue, and admitted to full qualification as symbolists only Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Valéry. From his line of approach, the essentials of symbolist writing are: poetic will and idealism, and an indirect system of conveying thought. Verlaine defaults on the grounds of too much directness of expression and intimacy of feeling.

Despite his comprehensive title, *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1950), A. G. Lehmann warns that an investigation of technique would be fruitless as a common ground of symbolist writing. Instead, he treats symbolism as a philosophy of art; his very general

definition of the term—which he considers to be an inconvenient label—makes it possible for him to speak of Vielé-Griffin and Verhaeren in the same breath with Mallarmé and Rimbaud as giants of poetry. Non-committal in judgment, Mr. Lehmann brings no new evaluation to the field. Proceeding by themes rather than by chronology, he builds up his symbolist concept of imagery, dream, myth, by examination of sundry writings both great and inferior. He excludes spontaneous inspiration and impulsive writing from the symbolist ideal, emphasizing instead the voluntary aspect of symbolist art. The negative influences on the Symbolists, noted elsewhere, are studied here under somewhat different organization, and from a philosopher's rather than a literary critic's point of view. However, the one definite contribution that Mr. Lehmann can accord to the Symbolists in his scrutiny of their works is after all in the field of linguistic innovations rather than in aesthetics.

Two recent works, one in French, the other in English, use French Symbolism mainly as a springboard for the study of English Symbolism. Louis Cazamian's book, *Symbolisme et poésie: L'Exemple anglais* (Neuchâtel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1947) gives the French school of 1885 credit as initiators of slogans and theories which publicized poetic powers of suggestiveness and subtlety belonging more intrinsically to English poets. Although Ruth Z. Temple's more recent book, *Critic's Alchemy* (N. Y.: Twayne, 1953) also considers French Symbolism from the point of view of its dominant influence on English poetry, her attitude toward the French poets appears somewhat kinder: but the impression is due to the fact that she is not referring to the same poets as Cazamian. Following the early English connotation of the word and the more recent one of Bowra's *The Heritage of Symbolism*,<sup>2</sup> she is writing primarily of Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé in discussing symbolist mysticism and verbal magic.

Paradoxically, to get a fresh concept of Symbolism and a newer appraisal, one must go to recent poetic studies which are only indirectly concerned with the subject. Silence or faint praise have proved better "trieurs" than positive literary judgments. Outside of the few general surveys, most of which have been mentioned above, no one has seemed engrossed in the past ten years with the authentic Symbolists, those who invented the movement, coined the expressions, wrote the manifestoes, directed the periodicals. Meager, easy to compile, are the bibliographies of writings about "chefs d'école" such as Gustave Kahn, Jean Moréas, Henri de Régnier, René Ghil, Stuart Merrill.<sup>3</sup> When they are mentioned it is no longer as Symbolists but as something else, or *in passim*, in relation to someone else: Maeterlinck as philosopher, Verlaine as an impressionist or as a Catholic, Albert Mockel as a critic.<sup>4</sup> These Symbolist coterie writers, who flattered themselves on being aestheticians, fill in as biographical or

2. C. M. Bowra's book (1943) falls outside the decade here under consideration.

3. This seems particularly unjust in the case of Saint-Pol-Roux.

4. See J. Mathews, *La Wallonie*.

circumstantial data in works about others. The popular Verlaine solicits no great critical interest,<sup>5</sup> even on the occasion of the appearance of a definitive edition of his works.<sup>6</sup> His poetry embarrasses the modern critic by its facility of thought, directness of feeling: the very music of his verse has become a quality now relegated to secondary importance in the scale of symbolist virtues.

Laforgue has fared somewhat better, perhaps because of his connections with Max Jacob, Picasso, Apollinaire in France, T. S. Eliot in England—but not principally as a Symbolist. It is significant to note that the two most important recent studies on him, Léon Guichard's *Jules Laforgue et ses poésies* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950) and Warren Ramsey's *Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1953) qualify the poet's Symbolism. M. Guichard, apologetic in tone as if he were dealing with a stigma, explains away much of Laforgue's connections with the movement as social and emotional: his friendship with Gustave Kahn, his devotion to other Symbolist writers. Both M. Guichard and Mr. Ramsey assert that linguistically Laforgue was far removed from the Symbolists. Mr. Ramsey gives as an example the grotesque character of the imagery in Laforgue "that self-respecting symbolists regarded as unfit for poetry." The disparity in technique between the Symbolists and Laforgue is attributed by both writers to the credit of the poet.

In fine, a single poet has survived a literary movement, in the person of Stéphane Mallarmé. But the word "Symbolism" has become a measuring rod in the discussion of poets who do not necessarily fall into the confines of a literary school; it serves as a critic's gauge, particularly in the study of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Valéry.

Concerning these four poets there has been a veritable harvest of research and literary criticism since World War II. The tendency is to go back to the texts, to the deciphering of ideas in specific works, and away from the formulation of theoretical generalizations. Even psychological affinities have been minimized. Ideas rather than the expression of feelings, intentions rather than the effects produced are the order of the day. The study of the symbolism of language, and the uses of symbols as expressions of synesthesia have become standard practice in the analyses of poems of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and Valéry. In connection with the veritable index of symbolism that Pierre Guiraud<sup>7</sup> devised for the works of Mallarmé and Valéry (as well as one for Apollinaire), one commentator refers to the general trend of which it is indicative by saying that whether one admits it with smiles or with tears, literary history is fast approaching chemistry.<sup>8</sup>

5. The latest serious treatment of Verlaine as poet dates back to 1943: Alexandre Micha, *Verlaine et les poètes symbolistes*.

6. A major edition in 1953 collected by Yves Gérard Le Dantec (Paris: Messein).

7. Pierre Guiraud, *Index du vocabulaire du symbolisme* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1953).

8. *Bulletin critique du livre français*, no. 9, p. 128 (Paris, 1954).

There is little to add to Henri Peyre's absorbing synthesis of the multiple facets of Baudelaire. Of far greater service than a simple bibliography, his unpretentious little book, *Connaissance de Baudelaire* (Paris: Corti, 1951) examines the wealth of Baudelaire criticism in terms of basic ideas and methods and places an organized unit before his readers. He brings us a significant definition of the expansive character of Baudelaire's symbolism. In recent years the personality of the poet has not been as alluring as the poems themselves. Outside of Sartre's indictment of the man Baudelaire, and Maurice Nadeau's current repetitions of the alleged effects of the poet's milieu on his character, ("Baudelaire et son temps," *Lettres Nouvelles*, Jan. 1955), the emphasis is clearly on the contents of the work: the study of the philosophical overtone of his themes in Marc Eigeldinger's book, *Le Platonisme de Baudelaire* (Neuchâtel: 1952); of his literary artifices as intermediaries between words and designated objects (a new definition of symbol?) in Judd Hubert's *Esthétique des 'Fleurs du Mal'* (Genève: P. Cailler, 1953); an analysis of concepts and the framework of their expression in Jean Prévost's posthumously published *Baudelaire* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1953, edited by Pierre Bost); of the concrete material elements of his imagination in Martin Turnell's *Baudelaire* (New York: New Directions, 1953). Insofar as his literary legacy is concerned, the chief stress is still on his concept of correspondences and thereby on his link to symbolist attitude and expression. In the work of L. de Sugar, *Baudelaire et R. M. Rilke* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1954), this connection is carried over to the German neo-romanticist period of 1890 and explained as the basis of Baudelaire's influence on Rilke. The author emphasizes the essential realism underlying the two poets' contemplation of nature's correspondences.

But more than from Baudelaire, Symbolism has profited from the ever increasing prominence of Arthur Rimbaud. The popularity of Rimbaud as poet and as focus of literary criticism verges on the fantastic. The French literary almanac of 1947-48 records the fact that in that year *Une Saison en enfer* sold as many copies as in all the years between 1870 and 1940. Then, in 1950 the furor of the literary hoax of the *Chasse spirituelle*, which embarrassed critics and editors, brought a new avalanche of Rimbaud commentaries. Whether one agrees or not with M. Etienne's voluminous compilation of the legends supposedly enveloping Rimbaud, his work, *Le Mythe de Rimbaud* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954, 2 vols.) serves, in the absence of any other up-to-date bibliography as a source book on Rimbaud criticism up to the year 1950. His plea to return to the texts for a more direct understanding of Rimbaud is excellent advice. Jacques Gengoux' *La Symbolique de Rimbaud* (Paris: Editions du Vieux Colombier, 1947) is a case in point. Such detailed examinations of structure and sounds tend to draw the poet away from literary relationships, from general aesthetic concepts of the epoch, and attempt to restore him as an independent figure. However, there is the danger, as in the case of Gengoux' work, of

losing the unit of the poem in the over-assiduous analysis of its parts. Another Rimbaud controversy of recent debate, the dispute over the chronology of the *Illuminations* and the *Saison en enfer* again brings into focus the importance of the texts themselves over circumstantial or biographical data. Ever since Marcel Raymond's *De Baudelaire au surréalisme*, in literary alignments drawn up by French writers, Rimbaud has been made to appear in closer relationship to Surrealism than to Symbolism. He is drawn even farther from Symbolism as, through the study of his specific uses of language, the substantial and concrete character of his images is sought out, instead of the indirect, spiritual connotations which they were supposed to have fostered. Such a demonstration is the article by Pierre Richard, appearing in a recent number of *Esprit* (Dec. 1954—Jan. 1955), entitled "Rimbaud ou la poésie du devenir." In it the author leaves aside generalizations and concentrates on the physical elements of Rimbaud's landscapes, thus sidestepping the symbolistic implications of the imagery.

There is also a tendency to separate Rimbaud more and more from his erstwhile associations with Verlaine—which had done more to link him with symbolism than any other single factor—and to throw light, instead, on some of his other relationships, such as his friendship with Germain Nouveau, which André Breton suggests as worthy of study, in his little book, *Flagrant Délit* (Paris: Thésée, 1949), written in connection with the controversies over the *Chasse spirituelle*.

Interest in Mallarmé also runs high, and in the same direction as in the case of Rimbaud: interpretation of the texts and elucidation of the aims and motivating forces of the work of art. Gardner Davies' "Stéphane Mallarmé: Fifty Years of Research" (*French Studies*, Jan. 1947, pp. 1-26) gives a close-up of his tremendous literary fortune; for bibliographical purposes, however, it is not entirely adequate, as the information about specific books is incomplete. A recent book by Guy Delfel, *L'Esthétique de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Paris: Flammarion, 1951) works out from random sayings by Mallarmé an elaborate system of aesthetics. Exegeses and word studies abound. An astounding work by Charles Chassé, *Les Clefs de Mallarmé* (Paris: Aubier, 1954) claims that Mallarmé wrote with the Littré dictionary as his constant guide in his search for unusual connotations for the simplest words. The author suggests that herein lies a basic difference in style between Mallarmé and the Symbolists, for unlike the Symbolists who in general are enticed by rare vocabulary, it is through the plainer words of the language that with the aid of Littré, so says M. Chassé, Mallarmé is able to create his extraordinary effects. As in Laforgue studies noted above, a number of Mallarmé's commentators would make of the poet, so long the mainstay of Symbolism, something other than a Symbolist. Guy Michaud in his *Mallarmé, l'homme et l'œuvre* (Paris: Hatier-Boivin, 1953) calls him the involuntary promoter of Symbolism albeit its "vainqueur incontesté." Earlier, Mme E. Noulet's *Stéphane Mallarmé*



(Paris: Droz, 1940) had judged Symbolism to be a transitory stage in Mallarmé's development and ranked him closer to Parnassian poetry because of his concern for *objects* as opposed to abstractions. In Jacques Schérer's study of Mallarmé's words and syntax, *L'Expression littéraire dans l'œuvre de Mallarmé*, (Paris: Droz, 1947), the poet was also represented as being linguistically the antithesis of the Symbolists because of respect for words as contrasted with the extravagances and neologisms of the Symbolist rank and file; all this would make of his Symbolism a superficial cloak for a deep-seated classicism. The same Gengoux who studied the concrete qualities of Rimbaud's poetry gives a rather special definition of Mallarmé's symbolism, finding in it a synthesis of Romantic idealism and a staunch adherence to reality. He considers it an oversimplification to draw lines between Symbolism and realism (*Le Symbolisme de Mallarmé*, Paris: Nizet, 1950). Such attitudes indicate a drastic departure from the rarefied atmosphere previously attributed to Mallarmé's imagery. However, the poet's symbolism, in the general sense of the word, is undermined not so much by individual opinions, as by the detailed interpretations of his meanings, which reach such a degree of elucidation that even if his works are admittedly symbolist in intention they become direct in meaning in the hands of his recent commentators and forever lose the allusiveness of indirect discourse, the *sine qua non* of symbolist poetry.

The case of Valéry is somewhat different. He is being established as a major poet and, because of the inconvenient literary epoch to which he belongs, he has to be "placed." The divergence of opinion in his case is natural. In Francis Scarfe's recent work, *The Art of Valéry* (London: Heinemann, 1954) Valéry represents the epitome of symbolism: "Leonardo's method is the most important manifesto for Symbolism that was ever written." Writing in England, Mr. Scarfe follows the English tradition of defining symbolism in its broadest terms. However, another recent English-speaking critic, Elizabeth Sewell, asserts that Valéry's obscurity is not within the symbols, and that one must avoid the "ill defined" label in order to judge him, rather, on his own merits (*Paul Valéry, The Mind in the Mirror*. Studies in Modern European Literature and Thought, Yale, 1952). Norman Suckling in his *Paul Valéry and the Civilized Mind* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954) sees in the poet's approach an elimination of the semi-mystical tradition. In fitting Valéry into symbolist tradition as a whole, he minimizes the musical element and stresses the loss of subjectivity as the basic feature of symbolism. Finding a blend of the Parnassian and the Symbolist in Valéry, the author is inclined to believe that the basic relationship between the two schools is one of similarity rather than of contrast.

As for the study of individual poems, the approach is ideological and linguistic. Marcel Raymond's *Valéry et la tentation de l'esprit* (Neuchâtel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1946) is a study of ideas. In Jean Hytier's more

9. The *Cahiers du Sud* devoted an entire number (Sept. 1946) to articles on Valéry.

recent book, *La Poétique de Valéry* (Paris: Colin, 1953) it is also Valéry's lucidity, consciousness of intention, will for composition that are emphasized rather than his literary ancestry. An effort is being made, as in the case of studies on Rimbaud and Mallarmé, to explain the language and specific imagery of Valéry. In the case of Valéry particular stress is laid on the conditions of composition: for instance, Albert Henry's *Langage et poésie chez P. Valéry* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1952) and Pierre Walzer's *La Poésie de Valéry* (Genève: P. Cailler, 1953). As with Mallarmé, exegeses are numerous. As in certain works on Rimbaud, an effort is made to get away from the abstractions in the poems and to throw light on the more concrete references to the poet's experience. Of particular note in this respect is Marcel Doisy's study, *Paul Valéry: Intelligence et poésie* (Paris: Le Cercle du Livre, 1952), in which an effort is made to draw "Le Cimetière marin" away from abstractions: to show how the abstract element is counterbalanced by the sensuality of the image instead of being the predominating feature of the poem. This is a daring departure from the thesis of pure poetry so long associated with Valéry.

It is evident that the rise above literary coteries of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and Valéry has sufficed to devalue the reputations of certain previously overrated theorists of the French Symbolist School. At the same time symbolism continues to be revered for the general attributes that it represents, such as the nobility of poetic mission, the keen consciousness of the multiple meanings of the word, and the reticent expression of personal experience. The problem at hand, one that is felt constantly in the studies of the past decade, is the need for re-examination of critical terminology, as recent research tends more and more to minimize the barriers heretofore raised between concepts deemed mutually exclusive, particularly those of symbolism and realism. Still, an inquiry into the present state of symbolist studies leaves many unanswered questions: what is the true relationship between Parnasse and Symbolism? where can the line be drawn between direct and indirect thought in poetry, between conscious intention and poetic impulse?

In considering these recent writings for their indications of critical methods, one recognizes how greatly the poetic function has changed. Under the influence of such as the Sitwells, T. S. Eliot, and Dylan Thomas in English, of such as Paul Valéry and André Breton in French, poetry, ceasing to be admitted as an emotional outlet, becomes a series of verbal strategies on the part of the poet and on the part of the reader an enigma in need of deciphering. What the poet intended rather than what he does to us is the subject of poetic analysis today. Verlaine, Maeterlinck, Laforgue, not to mention the earlier Lamartines and Mussets, are too simple in intention. Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé and those following in their wake have set a criterion which satisfies the modern mind in its demands for multiplicity and intricacy of meaning.

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## FRENCH SYMBOLISM IN ITALY

### Review Article by Olga Ragusa

SYMBOLISM has been the object of Italian critical interest since 1885, the date conventionally accepted for its formulation as an independent literary movement.

The Italian contribution to a study of the subject is distinguished largely by the two distinct appreciations of the movement which are reflected by the use of the terms *Decadentism* and *Hermeticism*, which frequently replace the purely descriptive *Symbolism* in discussions related to the subject. It can be said in general that critical works which are concerned exclusively with French literature follow the practice of French literary history and give preference to the term Symbolism,<sup>1</sup> while those which study the movement in its wider expressions or whose main emphasis is upon Italian symbolist writers prefer Decadentism and Hermeticism.<sup>2</sup> The use of the two terms is further differentiated by the fact that Decadentism has become

1. See, for instance, two recent studies: Luigi Sorrento, *Dal Parnaso al simbolismo* (Milano: La Goliardica, Ed. Universitarie, 1952) which deals especially with Sully Prudhomme and Francis Jammes; and Diego Valeri, *Il Simbolismo francese da Nerval a de Régnier* (Padova: Liviana editrice, 1954) which, besides essays, accompanied by translations, on Nerval, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Laforgue, Corbière, Lautréamont, Moréas, Verhaeren, Maeterlinck, and Régnier, contains a historical introduction including discussions of the Parnasse and of the early Symbolism of Nerval and Baudelaire. Earlier works devoted exclusively to French literature and following the terminology indicated are: Italo Siciliano, *Dal romanticismo al simbolismo* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1927) which is a study of the artistic development of Théodore de Banville; Ada Bernardini, *Simbolisti e decadenti* (Roma: Ausonia, 1935), a superficial history of the movements in the arts and in literature since Romanticism, with essays on Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Samain, Moréas, Fort, Claudel, and Valéry; F. Picco, "Simbolismo francese e simbolismo italiano," *Nuova Antologia*, 1 maggio 1926, pp. 82-91, a comparison of Verlaine and Pascoli taken as the outstanding representatives of the Symbolist movement in their respective countries; and Vittorio Orazi, "Il Cenacolo del simbolismo," *Rassegna Nazionale*, novembre 1932, a report on a visit to Mallarmé's house on the rue de Rome and an evocation of the famous *madris*.

2. Decadentism, which had in France itself preceded the use of Symbolism to refer to the anti-naturalist, anti-pantheist movement of the eighties is applied to French literature in F. Ermini, *Paolo Verlaine e i poeti decadenti* (Torino, 1896); regularly in the periodical literature of the turn of the century (see, for instance, the almost weekly articles which appeared in the *Gazzetta Letteraria* of Turin between 1898 and 1900, frequent book reviews published by the *Fanfulla della Domenica* of Rome between 1885 and 1893, two important articles which appeared in the Bolognese *Lettere e Arti*, 9 febbraio 1889 and 8 giugno 1889, and contrast all these with the critical terminology of Ad. van Bever, "Notes pour servir à l'histoire de la poésie contemporaine," in the Neapolitan *Flegrea*, 5, 20 marzo 1901); and by Ada Bernardini, *op. cit.*, where the term however is justified by the author's effort to distinguish between the Decadents and the Symbolists (p. 73). The designation Hermeticism, popularized by Flora in his ground-breaking study *La Poesia ermetica* (Bari: Laterza, 1936, revised edition 1947) is in that work applied by him not only to the poetry of Ungaretti, but to that of Baudelaire and Mallarmé as the forerunners *par excellence*, and especially to Valéry, contemporary exponent of the same theories.

the more or less accepted appellation for a definite period of Italian literature which corresponds to the French symbolist one and may be extended from there to parallel movements in other countries and in other fields.<sup>3</sup> Hermeticism, on the other hand, when it is not restricted to the poets of the twenties and thirties who directly answered to that designation, indicates investigations of the essence and procedures of poetry and may be used to refer to the whole area of "pure" or "difficult" or "obscure" poetry.<sup>4</sup>

The question of designation is not an idle one. It is related to the intellectual atmosphere out of which concern with French Symbolism grew and goes a long way toward describing the kind of interest which it elicited. If Decadentism with its negative moralistic overtones was the choice especially of the first period of interest, a period as yet dominated by Naturalism and naturalist-inspired attitudes and at the same time suspicious and critical of foreign, especially French, influences, Hermeticism was the choice of men trained in textual analysis, concerned with aesthetic intentions, and versed in the theoretical foundations of the "new" poetry. Early presentations, such as Vittorio Pica's *Letteratura d'eccezione* (Milano: Baldini-Castoldi, 1899), praised by Remy de Gourmont<sup>5</sup> as the work of the man who, together with Arthur Symons, was responsible for the best criticism of the new French literature, and indeed "the first representation of Decadentism in Italy,"<sup>6</sup> and Arturo Graf's "Preraffaelliti, Simbolisti ed Esteti" (*Nuova Antologia*, vol. LXVII, 1897; now collected in *Foscolo*,

3. Francesco Flora in his important *mise au point* of current problems in Italian literary history of the contemporary period (Attilio Momigliano, ed., *Questioni e correnti di storia letteraria* [Milano: Marzorati, 1949]) uses the term to describe not only the Italian phenomenon illustrated by D'Annunzio, Pascoli, Gnos, Fogazzaro, Pirandello, the "crepuscular," futurist, and hermetic poets, but also to Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Huysmans, Rimbaud, Lautréamont in France, Keats, Coleridge, Swinburne, Shelley, Wilde, Yeats, Arthur Symons, and Poe in English-speaking countries, Wagner, Nietzsche, George, and Rilke in Germany, and by further extension to impressionist painting and atonal music.

4. The bibliography on Hermeticism is long. Where it is concerned exclusively with Italian literature it does not directly concern us here. See, however, Enrico Falqui, *Pezze di appoggio* (3a edizione, Roma: Casini, 1951) for basic suggestions, and, in addition to what is mentioned elsewhere in this paper, Luciano Anceschi, *Autonomia ed eteronomia dell'arte* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1936) which includes chapters on Rimbaud and Baudelaire; Luciano Anceschi, *Saggi di poetica e di poesia* (Firenze: Parenti, 1942); Oreste Macri, *Esemplari del sentimento poetico* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1941); Ferdinando Giannessi, *Gli Ermetici* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1951); G. Contini, *Un Anno di letteratura* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1946); Aldo Capasso, *Saper distinguere* (2 vols., Genova: E. degli Orfini, 1934) which has essays on Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Histories of literature, such as Alfredo Galletti, *Il Novecento* (3a edizione, Milano: Vallardi, 1951) and F. Flora, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, Vol. III, Pt. II (Milano: Mondadori, 1947) should also be kept in mind. An excellent introductory chapter of general orientation will be found in Alberto Del Monte, *Studi sulla poesia ermetica medievale* (Napoli: Giannini, 1953).

5. R. de Gourmont, "Notices bibliographiques," *Mercure de France*, XXIX (1899), 197-198.

6. A. Momigliano, *op. cit.*, p. 805.

Manzoni, Leopardi [Torino: Giovanni Chiantore, 1924]), singled out by Walter Binni as indicative of the general lack of comprehension of the new poetry on the part of critics at the end of the century, are now outmoded. They have been replaced by Salvatore Francesco Romano's *Poetica dell'ermetismo* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1942), which turns from an examination of the work of Ungaretti, Montale, and Quasimodo to a consideration of the origin of their school, and is essentially a study of the suggestive element in poetry, and by Walter Binni's *La Poetica del Decadentismo* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1936; 2a edizione, 1949) which, though retaining a rather unfortunate epithet, attempts to liberate it from an implied unilateral interest in pathological characteristics and to apply it to "a European movement which took its point of departure from Romanticism, concentrated for a moment in France, and then spread as a new poetic language throughout Europe" (p. 14). Where the early critics closely followed their French contemporaries in the exposition of works and theories, being faithful and attentive reporters but also indignant censors of the *poètes maudits*, the *poseurs*, the mental defectives which a Max Nordau had delighted in characterizing,<sup>7</sup> the "hermetic" or "stylistic" critics of today (and the poets themselves, for that matter) turn to the French Symbolists because they find in them a poetic or intellectual sensitivity which corresponds to their own. "Criticism is no longer a question of taste, but of sensibility, which is a strengthened taste, a taste become vibration and passion," Giuseppe De Robertis had already noted in 1914 ("Collaborazione alla poesia," *La Voce*, December 15, 1914), and Carlo Bo's essay on Mallarmé (Milano: Rosa e Ballo, 1945) is only one of the highly personal "dialogues" in which this critic engages with the authors of his choice.<sup>8</sup> In Bo's work the obscurity and mystery of Mallarmé's poetry are reflected directly in the obscurity and mystery of the critic's own style, which in turn reflects his groping and intricate perceptions of the connections between "life" and "art."

7. Max Nordau, *Dégénérescence* (2 vols., Paris: Alcan, 1894); *Vus du dehors* (Paris: Alcan, 1894). For the first period see also Diego De Roberto, *Poeti francesi contemporanei* (Milano: L. F. Cogliati, 1900) in which the two clashing poetic tendencies, Decadentism and the Parnasse, are studied in the work of the poets Coppée, Heredia, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Moréas, and Régner; Vittorio Pica, *All'Avanguardia* (Napoli: Pierro, 1890) which contains articles on Huysmans, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, and Verlaine; and Lucio D'Ambra, *Le Opere e gli uomini* (Torino-Roma: Roux e Viarengo, 1904) which studies, among others, Coppée, Verlaine and Maeterlinck.

8. See a review of Bo's Mallarmé by Lanfranco Caretti in *Rivista di Letterature Moderne*, I (luglio 1950). All of Bo's writings on literature should be consulted for evidence of interest in, and especially influence of, Symbolism: *Otto Studi* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1938); *Nuovi Studi* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1946); *Antologia del surrealismo*, 1944; *Diario aperto e chiuso 1932-1944* (Milano: Edizioni di Uomo, 1945); *Nuova Poesia francese. Antologia a cura di Carlo Bo* (Parma: Guanda, 1952); *L'assenza, la poesia* (Milano: Edizioni di Uomo, 1948). See also, Carlo Bo, Tommaso Landolfi, Leone Traverso, *Antologia di scrittori stranieri* (Firenze: Marzocco, 1949).



Aside from the broad appreciations which we have indicated, Italian concern with French Symbolism has resulted in studies more limited in scope, occasioned by some immediate cause such as the celebration of an anniversary or the appearance of an important publication in France, by professorial interests as in the preparation of anthologies and texts for school use, and often by the careful attention given by the poets themselves to the work of their French colleagues.<sup>9</sup> The number of translations which are available for Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, or Valéry (to mention only the most outstanding names) is indeed surprising.<sup>10</sup> These translations have been the work not only of the early reporters who used them to illustrate their essays of presentation or to corroborate their controversial opinions—in which case they are often of doubtful literary value if not outright inexact and garbled<sup>11</sup>—but of the best poets. Concerned not with the problems of making a work of art available to a reader unacquainted with the language of the original, but with gaining an intimate knowledge of a text, an insight into the poetic structure and procedure, Alessandro Parronchi's or Piero Bigongiari's or Giuseppe Ungaretti's

9. A special number of *L'Immagine*, "Omaggio a Mallarmé," Anno II, no. 9-10 (agosto-dicembre 1948), appeared on the fiftieth anniversary of the poet's death. It contained essays by G. Contini, "Sulla trasformazione dell'*Après-midi d'un faune*," Luigi Magnani, "Mallarmé e i miti della musica," Cesare Brandi, "Psicoanalisi e poesia: Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Lautréamont," Giuseppe Raimondi, "Mallarmé poeta di circostanza," H. Mondor, "Mallarmé et Rodenbach," C. E. Magny, "Frontière de Mallarmé," and Pierre Missac, "Sur une limite de Mallarmé." Valéry's death was marked by a special number of *Poesia*, "Omaggio a Valéry," fasc. III-IV (1946) and by translations of B. Dal Fabbro, "In memoria di Paul Valéry, traduzioni e nota," *Aretusa*, Anno II (dicembre 1945). A pamphlet *Omaggio a Rimbaud* (Milano: All'Insegna del Pesce d'Oro, 1954) was issued to commemorate the centenary of Rimbaud's birth. It is a collection of prose and poetry by twenty-seven Italian poets and writers from Ardengo Soffici, who first introduced Rimbaud into Italy (*Arthur Rimbaud* [Firenze: Quaderni della Voce, 1911]) to Luigi Bartolini, Libero De Libero, Mario Lusi, Eugenio Montale, Salvatore Quasimodo, Ungaretti, and others. French publications reviewed in Italy range from the journalistic reports of the 1880's (in July 1884, for instance, Edouard Rod wrote in *Fanfulla della Domenica* both of Verlaine's *Poètes maudits* and of Huysmans' *A rebours*) through Thibaudet's book on Mallarmé (see G. A. Borgese, *Studi di letteratura moderne* [Milano: Treves, 1915]), down to the contemporary reviews of a Renato Mucci (see, especially the weekly *Idea*). To the anthologies Vittorio Lugli, *Da Villon a Valéry, il libro della poesia francese* (Messina: G. d'Anna, 1949) should be added.

10. For Baudelaire, among others: *I Fiori del male*, riduzione ritmica di Annunziato Presta (Roma: Signorelli, 1949) the first complete translation into Italian; *I Fiori del male* (Milano: Ed. Sonzogno, 1893) a prose translation by Riccardo Sonzogno; *Diari intimi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1949); also translations by Delio Cinti (Corbaccio, 1928), Alfredo Libertini (Lanciano-Carabba, 1931), Vincenzo Errante (Milano, 1932) and B. Dal Fabbro, *La Sera armoniosa* (Milano, 1944). For Mallarmé see Renato Mucci, "Saggio di un contributo italiano agli studi mallarmiani," *Poesia*, fasc. III-IV (1946); for Valéry, J. Darca, "Nota per sette traduttori italiani del *Cimetière marin*," *Poesia*, fasc. VII (1947).

11. See, for instance, Achille Richard, "I Decadenti francesi," *Gazzetta Letteraria*, 9 maggio-15 agosto 1896.

translations of the *Après-midi d'un faune* may be said to have taken the place in Italy of the textual analyses dear to French critics.<sup>12</sup>

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12. A. Parronchi, *Il Monologo, l'Improvisio e il Pomeriggio d'un fauno* (Firenze: Fussi, Sansoni, 1951); Piero Bigongiari, "Il Pomeriggio di un fauno," *Letteratura*, fasc. 2 (1946); G. Ungaretti, "Il Pomeriggio d'un fauno," "Monologo d'un fauno," *Vita d'un uomo*, V (Milano: Mondadori, 1948).

NOTE: The bibliographical indications given are far from complete. The subject is as yet unexplored and there are no systematic guides available. Material on the earliest period can be found only by consulting the periodical literature of the time; for later periods some information can be found in Joseph Fucilla, *Universal Author Repertoire of Italian Essay Literature* (New York: S. F. Vanni, 1941) and many references can be gleaned from the *French VII Bibliography* published since 1948 (New York: Stechert-Hafner).

## REVIEWS IN BRIEF

*The Pessimism of Leconte de Lisle: Sources and Evolution.* By Irving Putter. (University of California Publications in Modern Philology, Vol. 42, No. 1.) Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954. Pp. 144. What is pessimism? An over-attentiveness to the painful elements in experience generalized into a judgment on life which sees the gap between the real and the ideal as being too wide to be bridged. The pessimism of Leconte de Lisle is usually taken for granted and merely illustrated from his writings, although M. Estève incorporated in his work of 1923 a by no means negligible chapter on the subject. Very usefully, Dr. Putter undertakes to distinguish the sources of this pessimism and trace its growth as far as 1852, by which time the poet is in full possession of his system and his technique. He is less inclined to seek the sources in the young Créole's formative readings (one may regret that this aspect is neglected) than in a scrutiny of his early life, poetry and correspondence. Biographical data are scanty, but the origins of Leconte de Lisle's pessimism can scarcely be found in his physical constitution, the climate of his native island, parental incomprehension or antagonism, the quality of his education or his early love affairs; nor yet in "Creole langour" or a supposed Breton atavism. The answer lies in his sense of superiority and isolation, not free from intolerance and arrogance. "There is a conflict between his desire to communicate with kindred souls and his inability to adopt prevalent values." The kindred souls he finds (Adamolle, Rouffet) do not remain so indefinitely. He is conscious of ambient hostility—that of his uncle Louis is merely typical—and repays it with a like hostility. He has no sense of humour, but is extremely sensitive to derision. On the personal plane, this makes of him an intractable, intransigent and uncongenial youth and man. On the ideal plane, it explains his interest in religion and metaphysics, his desire to rise above the contingent and escape from the prevalent materialism. He would have been unhappy wherever he lived. In fact the impression grows that he liked being unhappy, that he cultivated and nursed his sorrow from beginning to end. His salvation was that he was able to generalize it and "elevate his personal and vague discontent to the nobility of a universal principle." In short the 'mal du siècle' fitted him like a glove.

This is but a rough summary of the clear and subtle analysis Dr. Putter makes of Leconte de Lisle's reactions up to 1845, when the Fourierist sectaries invited him to Paris to write for *La Phalange* and *La Démocratie Pacifique*. From a study of the poems written during the so-called socialist phase, two facts emerge. One is that the poet's apparent adherence to 'Phalansterian' principles in no wise prevents him from developing and voicing his personal, social and metaphysical despair, despite the optimistic conclusions (later eliminated from such poems as he did not completely jettison) which draw a contrast between what is, in what the Fourierists disparagingly called "Civilisation," and what will be, once the 'ère harmonienne' is inaugurated. The other is that these years plainly show Leconte de Lisle settling down to his cult of Hellenism and voicing nostalgic regrets for a golden age which lay in the past and not the future. The political articles in *La Démocratie Pacifique*, and the poet's already disillusioned activity during the early months of the Second Republic, confirm the view that he agreed with the Fourierists most unreservedly in their attack upon existing society. Dr. Putter has no use for the theory that the

collapse of republicanism and socialism in 1848, and more particularly the failure of Leconte de Lisle's proselytizing mission in Brittany, determined a violent reaction in his thought and provided a major motive for his pessimism. "Toute l'orientation de sa pensée fut changée," wrote M. Estève. On the contrary, the *Poèmes antiques* of 1852 represent a culmination and not a reaction. *Dies Irae* is implicit in all that he wrote before that date.

Dr. Putter has established his contention, though there is still a good deal which is puzzling in Leconte de Lisle's association with the Fourierists. No doubt he could never quite believe in the Utopia they predicted. Yet it was not in him to pay mere lip-service to an ideal for which he had no sympathy at all. There were aspects of the doctrine, as M. Flottes pointed out, which could attract and seduce the Romantics of the 1840's. The fantasy of interstellar migration, so much in favour in the nineteenth century, had its poetic appeal; echoes of it are found in Leconte de Lisle's later verse, and subsisted even in *Qaïn*. The Fourierist apology for free love as a legitimate expression of the passion for variety—"la papillonne"—appealed to his slumbering eroticism and no doubt played its part in suggesting the theme of *Eclogue harmonienne* which later, in *Chant alterné*, is narrowed down to a more definite antithesis between the Hellenic ideal of voluptuous joy and the Christian ideal of self-effacing chastity.

Moreover, for all their insistence on the propaganda value of art, the directors of *La Phalange* were more sympathetic than their Saint-Simonian forerunners had been to the cult of beauty for its own sake. There is no reason for supposing that they looked askance at Leconte de Lisle's eulogies of ancient Greece as an age of freedom and harmony, or at his use of the cloak of mythology in attacking the hideousness of 'Civilisation.' Nor is it imprudent to infer that, from 1845 to 1848, his oft-expressed yearnings for a happiness not yet found inspired him to make an effort to conquer his inborn pessimism and share the hopes of his Fourierist colleagues.

Dr. Putter concludes with a chapter on "The Mature Years" which considers Leconte de Lisle's distressing poverty from 1849 to 1856, his later love affairs, and the long indifference manifested by contemporaries to his poetry, as possible causes of an intensification of his pessimism after 1852. This rapid survey serves to strengthen the conclusion that "it was his pessimism which fashioned his life, not his life which produced his pessimism. At the root of his life and thought was his character, somber and unbending from start to finish, but ennobled throughout by a devotion to the loftiest ideals of humanity." Dr. Putter promises a complementary study which "will investigate the major aspects of the pessimism in the definitive work as well as its relationship to the thought of the period." Readers of his present monograph, which is scrupulous, lucid and judicious, will await this further contribution with interest. (H. J. HUNT, *University of London*)

*Journal littéraire, 1893-1903* de Paul Léautaud. Paris: Mercure de France, 1954. Pp. 364. Paul Léautaud was, for generations of readers between 1900 and 1930, the compiler, with Van Bever, of a poetic anthology, *Poètes d'aujourd'hui (1880-1900)* which did more than any other book for the spread and survival of Symbolism. He won some fame as a dramatic critic, under the name of Maurice Boissard: his acrid, lucid judgment was feared by playwrights and producers. He then became well-nigh forgotten until, since 1950 or so, he gave some entertaining and disarmingly

candid "entretiens" on the Paris radio. His *Journal*, the first volume of which covers the years 1893-1906, is again attracting attention to an octogenarian who has outlived Gide, Claudel, Valéry, Colette, Suarès and Matisse, all born around 1870.

Unlike Proust and Gide, Léautaud was no "grand bourgeois." His father was an actor of moderate talent, his mother a woman of less than doubtful virtue who abandoned her infant with little ado. He grew up a child of nature, and also of Paris and of theatres, sharpening an uncanny literary taste, ferociously brutal in words but at bottom a soft-hearted sentimental, athirst for tenderness. The chief interest of his *Journal* lies in the portrayal of the man: contradictory, afflicted with doubts about himself, shy, without illusions, generous and egotistic. His amorous liaisons, related with a rare simplicity, fill a sizable part of his jottings-down, much less disembodied than the diaries of Julien Green or Charles Du Bos, even of Gide.

Léautaud's primary concern was with acquiring the boldness necessary to become fully himself. That boldness did not come naturally to a man who was not endowed with a powerful personality, who had very little imagination, and who overflowed with sympathy and with kindness for his many literary friends. He had to wrench himself from them and to cultivate a certain "rosserie," at times reminiscent of Jules Renard. The struggle against his own leanings adds much to the interest of a private diary, otherwise encumbered with the usual trivialities of the genre.

Léautaud was an acute and independent observer of his contemporaries. Some of the sketches which he draws of literary circles around 1900 are entertaining. He knew Marcel Schwob intimately; he saw a great deal of Paul Valéry when Valéry toyed with his paradoxes against inspiration and spontaneousness in art, which he was later to take seriously, and his critics even more so. Those were also the days when Valéry was a violent anti-Dreyfus man and shocked his liberal friends by shouting: "Let him [Dreyfus] be shot and heard about no more!" Future thesis writers on Schwob and on Valéry's youth will cull several vivid details from the candid diary of their friend.

Léautaud, who eagerly wished to be no one's imitator and to keep aloof from fashions, fell a prey to one literary vogue—on which a thesis must also someday be written, since theses constitute, after all, our best source of precise knowledge on past literature: he adored Stendhal, identified himself with him, lived over again Stendhal's pathetic, ludicrous loves, disappointments and dreams, wept over the grave of "Arrigo Beyle, Milanese." The Stendhal cult owes much to Léautaud, but it is not so certain that Léautaud, and many of our modern Beylistes, gained equally from their worship of Stendhal. Fascinated by Stendhal's egotism, by his *Journals*, by his ever renewed attempts at autobiography, Léautaud and his friends with whom he associated in the cult became obsessed with introspective analysis and failed to see that Stendhal's supreme achievement lay in three or four novels. A bitter aftertaste spoils the pleasure which Léautaud's discursive and intelligent day-by-day notes first gave the reader. That man, and not a few of his contemporaries, had little to write about and failed to look around them, or in their imagination, for new and raw materials: they were intoxicated by literature and paralyzed by self-awareness. Like many others, they emptied their potential books of much content in order to enrich their intimate Journals. Léautaud is the demonstration through the negative of the courage which Proust, Gide, Valéry had to muster in order to become creators. (HENRI PEYRE, Yale University)



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